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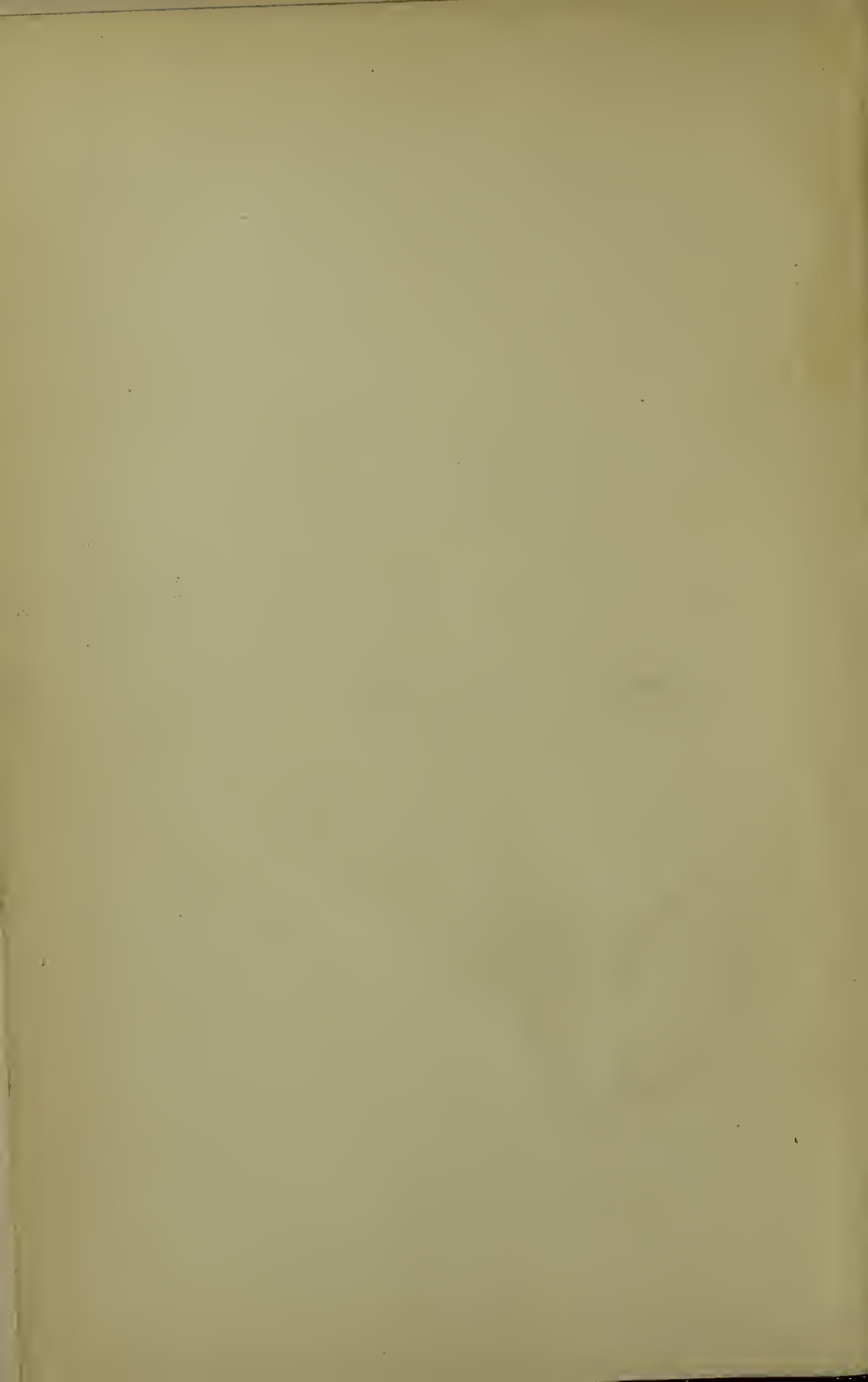
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SWEET FIRST-FRUITS



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SWEET FIRST-FRUITS

A Tale of the Nineteenth Century

ON THE TRUTH AND VIRTUE OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION



TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC AND ABRIDGED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

SIR WILLIAM MUIR, K.C.S.I.

Author of

The Life of Mahomet, 'The Caliphate, 'Mahomet and Islam,' etc. etc.

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P R E F A C E .

Bakooralh Shahiya, 'sweet,' or 'delectable first-fruits,' is a work in many respects the most remarkable of its kind which has appeared in the present day. It is a first-fruits of what we may expect from the reformation now so steadily spreading among the Eastern Churches; and as such, may take the highest rank in apologetic literature, being beyond question one of the most powerful treatises on the claims of Christianity that has ever been addressed to the Mahometan world. It is singular, also, as a work which only a native Christian could accomplish—one who, though born and bred in the East, has cast aside the corruptions of an effete ecclesiasticism, and has embraced in all its purity the faith preached in the same lands eighteen centuries ago. Further, it is remarkable as showing what a powerful influence this reformation is bringing to bear upon the Moslem population around. From the days of their Prophet they have been used to look with contumely and despite on Christianity, as represented by a ritual which to them is nothing short of idolatry. But now they have learned to regard the Christian faith exhibited by the Reformed Church in its pure and

simple worship with respect, and listen with patience, if not sometimes even with approval, to appeals such as are made so powerfully in the *Sweet First-fruits* to the teaching of the Book accredited by their own Coran as the Word of God. Christianity has in this way gained a prestige in the East—Syria and Egypt in particular—which it is difficult to over-estimate, and which may shortly lead to unexpected results.

A few details will now be given regarding the writer of *The Sweet First-fruits*.

He was born and bred a member of one of the Eastern Churches; but, convinced that its teaching was unscriptural, and its ritual and practices idolatrous, he cast off its profession, and embraced the gospel in all its simplicity. For so doing he was cast out by his family, and passed through a bitter time of trial. The following are some particulars I have learned from a friend regarding him;—

‘His family (he writes) were specially devout in saint-worship, Mariolatry and adoration of the holy *Eikonat* (pictures). When he was about seventeen, many years ago, I was awakened at midnight, one dark rainy night, by a knock at my door. The servant opened it, and the youth came in, drenched and chilled. He and his mother had come on a visit to his brother, and while here he studied the New Testament, and as a result refused to kiss the pictures, pray to the saints or to the Virgin, or confess to a priest. On the night in question he had persisted in studying his New Testament, when his mother and brother threatened him with expulsion from the house if he

did not desist. He would not yield, and at midnight they drove him out into the storm and darkness (it was winter), without clothing or bed. He came to me, and I gave him a home. The home persecution continued relentlessly. He said to me, "Oh the persecution of tears! I could bear beating, but my mother's tears are hard to bear. She thinks me lost for ever!"

The trials thus suffered were probably not less bitter than those of the Moslem converts in this tale when cast adrift from their homes and families, and which our author describes with all the pathos of one who himself had gone through the same (p. 111). He became a teacher and then a preacher of the gospel; and as such still survives. It would endanger his safety further to identify him. I will only add that, although unacquainted with any European language, he is otherwise an accomplished scholar, deeply versed in the Coran and Moslem tradition, and, as will be seen by the reader, a most powerful apologist.

Sweet First-fruits is a romance—a delightful story, and as such well fitted to attract the Oriental reader, and rivet his attention. But its frame-work is primarily designed to give scope and opportunity for presenting to the Moslem reader the proofs of the Christian-faith, the purity and genuineness of our Bible, its attestation by the Coran, and the consequent obligation on Moslems to obey its precepts. The argument is developed, in the dialectic style, between a party of Christian converts and their former companions. The tale is, I am assured, 'founded on fact,'

—not the history as a whole, for that bristles with startling improbabilities (all the more charming, as such, to Oriental readers of Eastern tales)—but the separate scenes. ‘It purports,’ my friend tells me, ‘to be simply an historical novel, and the author does not claim that the events really occurred; but similar events have occurred in different parts and at different times.’ What is here told may, then, be assumed to have, in point of fact, either actually happened in times past; or, from the present attitude of Islam towards Christianity, to be of possible occurrence any day.

It may be mentioned that the very day when our author left his home, a Mahometan was cast into prison close by for becoming a Christian. And my friend adds that ‘the facts connected with the persecution of Moslem converts coming thus to his knowledge just at the time when he was himself suffering the loss of all things for Christ’s sake, made a deep impression on his mind.’

The scene of the romance is the city of Damascus. An epistle from a Christian friend falls into the hands of some inquiring Moslems, who call together certain friends to hear it and discuss what answer should be given. These, to the number of twelve, have repeated debates, in which the argument for the genuineness of the Old and New Testaments, as borne testimony to by the Coran, is discussed at length. After several meetings the whole party are convinced, and resolve to adopt the Christian faith—all excepting a bigoted and fanatical youth, who, when he sees how the argu-

ment is going, hurries off to his Master, an equally bigoted and intolerant Sheikh. The Sheikh starts up in delight at the prospect of a religious fight, and addresses a letter of specious friendship to expostulate with the inquirers.

Sheikh Aly, the leading figure in the romance, replies in a letter holding firmly by the truth. The hostile Moslems, gathered in large numbers in the Sheikh's house, are greatly excited when the reply is read out to them. After sending a deputation with no better success, to expostulate with the perverts, information is lodged in the court of the Waly (governor) of the province, who, finding the matter serious, calls a council, before which the converts are summoned. They remain firm, and are being led away to prison, when, at the recommendation of the Caze, an upright and kindly affectioned man, they are recalled in order that they may be blandly reasoned with. A truly characteristic scene follows. Coffee and refreshments are served, and the chief citizens, in groups of two or three, gather round each of the little company in the halls of the palace, and bring every kind of blandishment to bear upon them. Three yield to these influences and recant. The rest are sent to prison, and the case reported to the Porte.

Then the hostile and fanatical party, on the principle of doing evil that good may come, lay a snare with the view of enticing the converts to speak despitefully of the Mahometan faith—that being a capital offence in Moslem lands. With this intent they enter the prison, ostensibly on a friendly visit to

induce the perverts to repent. They succeed in drawing out the youngest and simplest of the party who, when pressed to say whether he believes in the Coran, replies,—

‘If I did, why then should I become a Christian?’

The conspirators on this throw off the mask, cry out in feigned indignation, and cover the innocent confessor, as ‘a Christian dog and swine,’ with all kinds of vituperation. They then lodge a complaint in court, supported by false witnesses, that he had denounced the Coran and blasphemed the Prophet. The case is reported as one for capital punishment to the Porte, and an answer, received by telegraph, directs his execution. On the following day he is beheaded in presence of the officers of state and a military parade, and before a vast concourse of spectators. The martyr’s noble bearing, his last words, and the farewell to his wife and sister and two little sons, are all told with much power and pathos.

A riot, stirred up by the enemies of the converts, and headed by a wild and half-crazed fanatic, creates alarm in the city, and is only put down by military force. The excitement thus prevailing affords sufficient ground for reporting the continued presence of the converts at Damascus as dangerous. A rescript in answer from the Porte sanctions their exile, with the view of preserving the peace of the city; and Deyr al Camr, a Christian town in the Lebanon, is fixed on as the place of banishment. During the interval of about a fortnight the Cazee and the Mufty repeatedly visit the prison, and have long

arguments to induce Aly and his party to recant. The gist of the apology (chaps. x. and xi.) lies here. The discussion, in a lively dialectic style, runs over the whole of the issues against our faith, and is so ably conducted on the Christian side, that the Cazeer and the Mufty are virtually worsted at every point, while the amenity of the conference is maintained throughout. The debate, though carried on with sprightliness and vigour, may be felt tiresome from its length and occasional repetitions, by the European reader, but I do not think it will be so by the Oriental.

At last the party are led away to the Lebanon, where they are welcomed and made much of by the citizens of Deyr al Camr and the country round about. The place of exile, at first kept secret at Damascus, after a couple of months comes out; and the converts are then visited by their friends, many of whom are led to follow in their steps. After a time the expatriation is bruited abroad, and accounts of it find their way into European prints. The consuls in Syria make inquiry, and at the instance of certain of the chief Powers, lay the case for remission of exile before the Porte. In reply, a despatch is issued from Constantinople, explaining that in the Turkish empire there is by law absolute freedom to all classes in matters of conscience and religious profession. The little company, it proceeds to say, were exiled, not because of their conversion, but to avoid tumult and disorder in the fanatical city of Damascus. So soon as the fear of this should pass away, permission would at once be given for their return. Accordingly,

after a little more than a year's expatriation, the company journey back to their homes, where they are received with delight and rejoicing by relatives and friends. Omar's widow, who embraces her martyred husband's faith, is persuaded to marry Aly's brother, in order that her two sons may be brought up as Christians. At last Aly, now very old, falls sick, and an affecting account is given of his death-bed. His old friends come in hopes of inducing him to recant, but retire, wondering at his noble attitude, earnest expressions, and faith undaunted by the prospect of impending death. His last words, decease and burial are graphically described. The bier, escorted as a precautionary measure by a guard from the Waly, and followed by a vast crowd, is carried to the Christian church, where a touching address is delivered by the minister, and a hymn sung—the whole listened to reverently by the great assembly. The body is then borne to the Christian cemetery, and committed to the dust. Over the grave is erected a beautiful monument, with the verses the aged disciple loved most to repeat ; and in large golden letters his dying words, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'

Such is the tale, charming in itself, and of inestimable value as a pleasing vehicle for the arguments of the Christian advocate. Indeed, I make bold to say that the Moslem world has never, since the rise of Islam, had an appeal made to it under more favourable circumstances, nor one more likely to ensure respect, if not force conviction. Differing from all

former treatises, it contains not one word offensive to the Mahometan, beyond the strength and conclusiveness of the reasoning, which, indeed, is mainly drawn from the Coran itself. Other works may have been more able and learned, but they have alienated and offended the Moslem reader by attacks on the Prophet and his teaching. The argument turns mainly on the attestation of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures by the Coran. They are there praised as 'a guide' and a 'light'; 'perfect and complete in all that is excellent'; 'a light and direction to mankind'; and their observance enjoined as obligatory on 'the people of the Book.' All this is admitted by the Moslem apologist; but he impugns our present Bible as corrupt and tainted. The Christian advocate then pins his opponent on the horns of a dilemma; if tampered with, it must have been either before or since the rise of Islam. It could not have been before, else why the praise of these same Scriptures by the Prophet, and his injunction that the Jews and Christians of his day should follow them? and it could not have been since, seeing that copies and translations were scattered all over the world long before the days of Mahomet, and were also in the hands of sects and Churches hostile to one another. Again, as regards our Saviour's Divinity, much stress is laid on the remarkable epithets and attributes assigned in the Coran to the Messiah, as 'the Word' and 'Spirit of God,' His supernatural birth, etc.—descriptions which place Him incomparably above all other prophets; and (although there are passages of a contrary sense)

are inexplicable, excepting on the assumption of a Divine nature.¹ These views are pressed home with an authority, persistence and vigour from which, as an *argumentum ad hominem*, there would seem to the Moslem to be no way of escape.

This translation of the *First-fruits* I have made for several reasons. There are three classes for whom it may be useful. First, the English reader. It is well for our own countrymen to have before them a picture of the suffering which converts to Christianity in Moslem lands must endure, in order that their sympathies may be drawn out towards those who in our own day are passing through the same fiery trial, and also that they may encourage and support those who are labouring in this interesting field, and may pray God to give strength to the tried. The English reader must not judge the work by our Western standard. Reiteration and pleonasm are a virtue, and not a defect, in the Oriental student's eye; and I doubt not that, improbabilities and repetition notwithstanding, his interest will be kept up to the end.

Next, there are missionaries and others who may wish to offer the Arabic original to their Mahometan friends, but are not familiar with the language in which it is written; it is right that these should be satisfied of its value by having an outline of its contents. It is further possible that such may find in this

¹ The reader will find these and other similar passages in a little work, *The Coran, and the Testimony it bears to the Holy Scriptures*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

English version arguments that will prove serviceable in conference with the Moslem people, as well as an admirable model of the spirit in which such arguments should be conducted.

There are also in many lands—more especially India, Turkey and Egypt—a large and increasing class of Mussulmans, versed in the English language, to whom this version may be more accessible and easy to understand than the original Arabic, and who may find in it sufficient material to show that the gospel cannot with consistency and safety be neglected by any professor of the Moslem faith.

The present work illustrates the paramount importance of encouraging the reformation among the Christian populations of the East, for it is only through them that we can reach the Moslem peoples with the slightest hope of success. We may and ought to do all in our power to enlighten the ancient Churches; and so be doing Christianity a good service. But nothing short of a real reformation, carrying with it the abandonment of their superstitions, will avail to make the Moslem world look upon these churches otherwise than with the pity and compassion with which we regard a fetish heathen. It was their worship of the creature, the adoration of pictures and of the Virgin Mary, which gave Mahomet himself and his immediate followers the power to overthrow Christianity in the East, and which in times past have rendered weak and impotent all attempts at conversion even to the present day. The Moslems still cast in the teeth of the Christian advocates that passage

in Sura Maida in which the Messiah is asked by the Almighty: 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, hast thou indeed said unto men, "Take Me and My mother for two Gods, besides God?" and then triumphantly quote the reply of Jesus: 'God forbid, it is not for Me to say that which I ought not.' The UNITY is bound up in the heart of a Moslem; and no teaching which recognises or goes hand in hand with the ritual and practices of the ancient Churches has the smallest prospect of influencing the Mahometans of the East.

Another hopeful point is the respect with which the Reformation is regarded as emanating from the English nation. The reader will not fail to observe the dominant attitude assumed in this work for the Christian faith as politically in the ascendant. Thus, when the Cazez advances the rapid spread of Islam and overthrow of great kingdoms as evidence of the faith, Sheik Aly quietly points to its decline in the present day before the prowess of Christian nations (p. 137). Far different is it with the ancient Churches of the East. It is not their fault that they have been cast into the dust and trodden under foot all through these long centuries; indeed, ever since the conquest of Syria in the reign of Omar.¹ The

¹ See the so-called *Ordinance of Omar* against Jews and Christians;—'Coloured stripes must be sewn on their garments, and those of their slaves, and restrictions observed as to flowing robes; their women to wear yellow veils abroad; riding allowed only on mules, and with wooden stirrups and wooden knobs on their saddles; the figure of Satan must be on the door-posts of their houses; tombs level with the ground. They were debarred from offices of state; their children forbidden to be

wonder is that they have survived at all,—proof of the marvellous vitality of our faith even thus corrupt. But not the less must we take note of the sentiment which leads the Moslem to look down with compassion and disdain upon the ancient Churches of the East;—Nestorian, Coptic, Jacobite, and Greek, as well as the Romish secession. This sentiment of the social and political degradation of the ancient Churches is so ingrained in the mind of every Moslem, that, conjoined with their abhorrence of the quasi-idolatrous rites and practices which pervade their ritual, it is no wonder that Christianity in the East has made little way, but has remained, all these twelve centuries, passive and helpless under its oppressive yoke. And so it will remain with any effort of the Churches themselves, and not less of those who would work in conjunction with them. In establishing an Eastern propaganda, for which the path is now being thrown so marvellously open, it would be a fatal mistake to attempt the work hand in hand with the unreformed Churches. The contempt of centuries would attach to it. The attempt, so far as concerns its influence on the Moslem world, is doomed to failure.

Far otherwise is it with such efforts as are now being made by the Churches which distinctively taught in Moslem schools, or by Moslem masters; churches of recent date to be demolished; no cross to be paraded at their festivals, or erected in any street.' See *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall*, pp. 147, 522; Religious Tract Society, 1891. Such were the standing orders reiterated from time to time with ever-growing intolerance and contempt, from the conquest of Syria in Omar's reign.

call themselves 'evangelical,' planted in Syria and adjoining lands, and rapidly extending there in numbers and in influence. They come into the field as a young and vigorous force, which at once socially, politically, and spiritually command from the Mahometan races surrounding them, candid inquiry and respect. The position is, as our author shows, apologetically unassailable, and already 'first-fruits,' the promise of an abundant harvest, have plentifully been gathered in.

It must not be lost sight of that such a treatise as the present could have been composed by none other than a native of the country, and by one, moreover, who has cast off the superstitions prevailing there. The whole energy of our Churches should therefore be thrown into the grand work of pressing forward the movement which has been so hopefully commenced, and of multiplying the number of men who, like our author, natives of the East, and imbued with the spirit of the gospel in all its simplicity, are thus fitted for the work of the Apologist, and for attracting the Moslem population to the Christian faith. That there should in the Church at home be any difference of opinion and practice on this point is marvellous. It can only arise, one would fain hope, from the situation being imperfectly understood; for what loyal Christian would prefer the interests of Churches, however ancient and interesting, to the spread of the gospel among the myriads of Moslems now awakening to the call? One makes bold to say that our author's Apology, in the present state of Eastern lands, heralds a new departure. I do not think I

am unduly sanguine in believing that if all our Churches united heart and soul in the work, there would arise an ever-extending field of Christian enterprise in the East, and an ingathering therefrom, such as has not been seen since the first establishment of the Christian faith in these lands. And may many be raised up in this great reformation to emulate in their labours the honoured author of *Sweet First-fruits!*

I trust that this work, in its original text, will be widely disseminated wherever Islam prevails; and also that translations will at once be made into the vernacular languages of Turkey, Persia, India, and other lands in which Mussulmans dwell. It is ours to provide the means, it is His to add the blessing, and to grant that a rich harvest may follow the dissemination of these Sweet First-fruits.

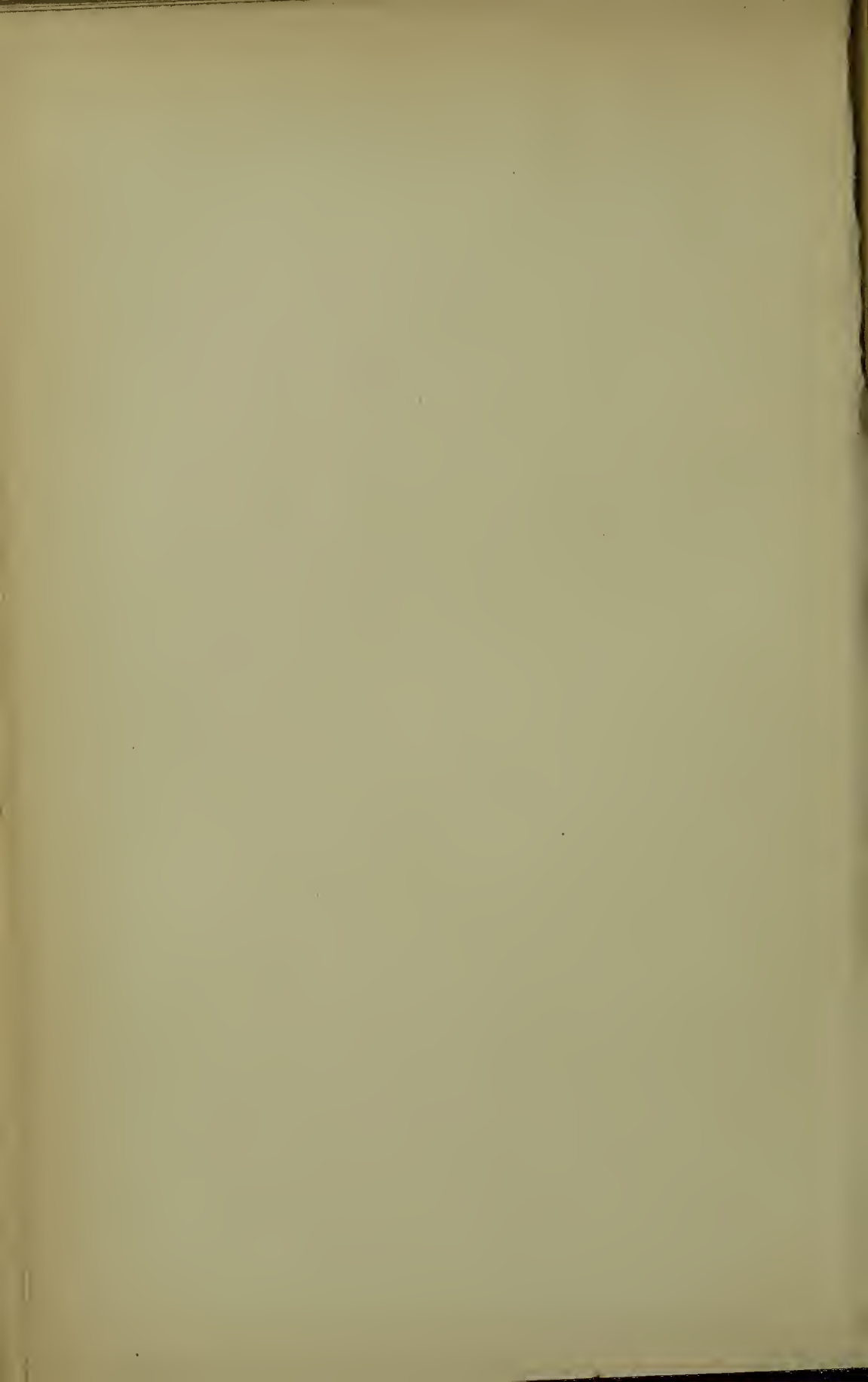
W. M.

EDINBURGH,
March, 1893.



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SWEET FIRST-FRUITS.



INTRODUCTION.



PRAISE be to the Heavenly King, who hath revealed the truth unto us in the Holy Scriptures—a guide unto His people, and a light to show forth His glory!

Now I have written this story with a view to unveil hidden truths and precious mysteries by way of debate and dialogue. The tale makes no pretension to literary merit, but I trust that the method chosen may, with the Divine blessing, approve itself to the thoughtful and impartial reader, of whom I beg that he will treat with indulgence whatever is feeble or imperfect. I pray God that the tale may benefit both him that reads and him that hears the same. He is my strength and Helper; to Him be praise now and evermore!



CHAPTER I.

THE EPISTLE.

THERE lived at Aleppo a Christian, Yohanna Gheiyur by name, and between him and a certain citizen of Damascus, called Abd ul Hady, there grew up a close and lasting friendship. They used often to discuss questions bearing on their respective religions; and, as a result, the Sheikh one day received from his friend an earnest and well-reasoned epistle, *Divine Truth in the Book of the Living God, and the Christian Faith set forth therein, the only true Religion.* While deep in its study Abd ul Hady was visited by a pious and learned Skeikh, Aly Omar, whom he asked to read it, and advise whether it should be answered, and if so, how. Aly found the arguments so hard to meet that he declared himself unable, without the advice of fit and learned friends, to say whether any reply should be given. 'And after all,' he added, 'two are better than one; what think you?' Abd ul Hady agreed, and so Aly at once sent to invite a learned company of friends to come for the purpose to his house. Some were Sheikhs, some Syeds, and two Effendies (Arabs or Turks of noble birth); in all, with himself and friend, twelve in number. So when, after supper, they had assembled in his private chamber, he explained his purpose, and begged

of them to listen to the epistle which his friend had received in support of the Christian religion, and thereafter advise as to how it should be dealt with. Whereupon, at his motion, Abd ul Hady arose and read it in their hearing.

The epistle is of considerable length; it will suffice briefly to summarize the contents.¹ Its object is to establish the authority of the Bible, and of Christianity as based thereon, and borne testimony to by the Coran. Holding it reasonable that man should look for a revelation of his Maker's will, the writer proceeds to show how that will was gradually unfolded to the chosen race, and embodied in the Books of Moses; and how, in consequence of their apostacies, prophets were sent from time to time to recall the Israelites to the worship of the one true God. Such revelations ceased some four hundred years before the mission of Jesus Christ, and about a hundred years later (*i.e.*, about three hundred years before the Christian era) were collected in the form in which we now have them. Their genuineness is confirmed by various arguments, as the fulfilment of prophecy; predictions of the Saviour and of His rejection; and the frequent story of the sins and backslidings of the Israelites; subjects which, had they been inclined to tamper with their Scriptures, would surely have been expunged therefrom. Of the many religions prevalent on the earth there can be but one true religion, as there is but one true God; and for that

¹ The arguments are all brought out in the later discussions, so that it would be unprofitable to give the letter *in extenso*.

we must look to His revealed word. The Hebrew books abound with references to the coming Saviour ; and He was looked for by the nation, as, for example, in the story of the woman at the well of Samaria. His mission was established by miracles, and His death and resurrection by the testimony of His followers, though threatened with persecution even to the death. The Incarnation, though beyond our reason, is in no wise opposed to it; for nature abounds in things we believe, though we cannot understand. As little children take their father's word for things beyond their comprehension, so should man his Heavenly Father's; and so must we accept with all humility what in His word He hath revealed to us of His own nature.

His friend had sent him a couplet by a profane poet, who asked 'how God could suffer, and where the Father was when the Son was crucified?' Such language showed the grossest ignorance of what Christianity really taught. It was in His human nature that Christ died, without affecting the Divine, just as the golden tissue remains when the scarf is burned. If the Father, out of infinite compassion, sent the Son to bear our nature, and as predicted in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, to bear our sins, was it for the creature to raise objection? If Divine justice be satisfied—as illustrated in Abraham's offering of his son, and by the institution of Jewish sacrifices—was it not rather a cause of infinite gratitude on the part of man? Passing over the objections of agnostics, who believe in nothing, and of the great mass of mankind,

who believe only in the religion they were born and bred in, the writer takes up certain objections raised against the Christian Scriptures. Alleged discrepancies are shown not to touch the essence of the revelation.

The series of books from beginning to end of the Bible forms an integral development of the Divine will. Six centuries after Christ the Coran gave unequivocal testimony to both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. Copies of these in the original, and translations in many languages, were by that time multiplied all over the earth, in the hands, moreover of many conflicting sects, so that alteration since that date was out of the question. In fact, the Coran accused Jews and Christians, not of tampering with their sacred books, but of neglecting their precepts, and upbraided them in such terms as these:—

‘O people of the Book, ye are nought unless ye be grounded on the Tourât (Old Testament) and on the Gospel, and that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord.’¹

‘How then is it possible’ (thus ends the epistle) ‘for you, my friend, to cast the Old Testament and Gospel behind your back, seeing that they are the very same Old Testament and Gospel, genuine and unchanged, as were borne testimony to in the seventh century, without impugning the authority of the Coran? If you receive the Coran, you cannot but accept the Bible. I call then upon you to read it as the revelation of God. Admitting it as such, you cannot hold that it was intended only for Jews and

¹ Sura Maida (The Table), v. 72.

Christians. God is one, and His revelation must be equally one—a manifestation of the Divine will for all mankind. Reading the Holy Scriptures, the truth will dawn upon you that just as there is one sun which illumines the whole world, even so the Sun of righteousness, the Saviour, is the light of all mankind. And in accord therewith the Divine command runs thus:—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

'Presuming on your kindness and love of truth, I have ventured, my friend, to write thus freely to you, and pray that you may find the blessed gospel to be your guide unto everlasting life.

'Your faithful friend,

'YOHANNA GHEIYUR.'

Having finished the reading, Abd ul Hady sat down, and the company for some minutes remained silent. At last Sheikh Aly said,—

'My friends, you have heard the epistle. What think ye?'

Syed Ibrahim.—'The reasoning, of a truth, is weighty, and the arguments, at first sight, difficult to answer. It behoves us to discuss them one by one, and then we shall be able to say in what way it should be treated.'

Thereupon Abd ul Cadir started up.

'Friend,' said he, 'the Syed is garbling the truth and leading you astray. Though youngest among you, I warn you not to forget that ye are followers of the blessed Prophet and glorious Coran.' With

that, he launched forth into panegyric of Islam—the one and only means of salvation ; and bade them beware of the insidious attempt to undermine their faith. ‘The honeyed morsel is steeped with poison ; away with it’ he cried, ‘from you, if ye be true believers !’

Then arose Abd ul Halîm, and spoke, leaning on his staff from great age :—

‘Abd ul Cadir hath said nothing amiss of the danger of heresy. But let us not judge hastily by first appearance. Everything red is not a cinder, nor yet every black a slave. Jewels may be hid in the sand, and in the clod a precious stone. With Syed Ibrahim I advise that we cast not the epistle hastily aside. It contains no word of abuse against our faith, but contrariwise, words of love and friendship. Rather, as wise and thinking men, let us study its contents. What is false we shall reject, and if there be in it aught of truth, accept the same.’

Omar Effendy then closed the conference. Concurring with Abd ul Halîm, he deprecated casting the epistle aside as unworthy of notice. ‘Rather,’ said he, ‘let us consider it as learned and impartial Moslems should, and then reply to its able and friendly criticisms. But the day is now far spent, and if it be your pleasure, we shall end our sitting now, and come together again, when, having had time to ponder over the various arguments, we shall be better able to come to just conclusions thereupon.’

To this they all agreed ; and so, after they had partaken of refreshments, which Sheikh Aly placed before them, they departed each to his own abode.

CHAPTER II.

DEEP WATERS.

THE reading of the epistle had a strange effect upon Soleiman, one of the company. On his way home from the assembly he was lost in thought, hardly knowing whither he went, till his head knocked against the lintel of his door. Entering, he could think of nothing else. Now sitting, now rising, he ruminated thus:—The Coran bears testimony to the Tourât and to the Gospel; yes, yes; and they cannot have been altered since. Six hundred years after Christ they were attested by the Prophet as the word of God. Then Jesus must have been Divine, and have died for our sins. O Soleiman! what way is there out of this dilemma? Can it be that the Coran is not true? Never! that cannot be; and yet it contradicts the Book to which it beareth testimony. Alas! alas! how can I escape from this maze in which I wander? I must forget it all; and yet I can't. Ah! what shall I do? I am not clever like the rest. I will go and unbosom myself in the morning to Sheikh Mehmud (one of the twelve), if haply he may help me.'

And so he went on all night till break of day; when, wearied, he went off to sleep. In a couple of hours he awoke; and, having first asked God's

guidance, went straight away to Mehmud's house. Shocked at his worn look, the Sheikh invited him into his garden, where they seated themselves under a shady tree. Then, with some hesitation, Soleiman began:—He had been awake all night, thinking of that epistle they had been reading. A voice kept ringing in his ears that it was true; he had tried to banish it; but, ever and anon, a cord seemed drawing him back to the dilemma, till, wearied, he fell asleep, and on waking said, 'I will go and open my mind to my friend, and seek for guidance at his hands.'

Sheikh Mehmud, having listened, sat silent for a time.

'My brother,' at length he said, 'the matter that has disquieted you is indeed of supreme moment; and, believe me, the anxiety which has kept you awake is a blessing in disguise, for which you may have to thank God yet. Be comforted, for I myself have passed through the same experience. Wilt thou give an attentive ear to what I have now to say?'

Soleiman.—'Good master, say on.'

Mehmud.—'You know the earnestness and devotion with which I was wont to read the Coran, and how it used to affect me even to tears. Well then, while thus engaged, I stumbled, as it were, upon a verse in the sixth Sura, that struck me dumb with astonishment. It was this: "Lest ye (O people of Mecca) should say, Truly the book hath been revealed unto two peoples before us (*i.e.* Jews and Christians), and we were neglectful of their reading of the same."

- ¹ Sura vi. (Inam v.), 156.

Now, thought I, if this were a reproach from God against the Meccans for their neglect to read the Bible, how can we, without reproach, be neglectful of the same? Then, again, this other verse came suddenly upon me, "If they (Jews and Christians) observe the Tourât and the Gospel, and that which hath been revealed unto them from their Lord, verily they shall eat (of good things) from above, and from beneath their feet."¹ And yet further, "O ye people of the Book! ye are not grounded upon anything until ye observe the Law (Tourât) and the Gospel, and that which hath been revealed unto you from your Lord."²

'Pondering over these texts, I marvelled that I had never observed them before; and, longing to see the books thus lauded in the Coran, I searched for them, like a weary traveller for a fountain in the desert. I succeeded at last in buying an Old Testament from a Jew. The Gospel I shrank from getting at any Christian's hand, lest he should have interpolated words concerning Christ's divinity and death; but at last I got one at a book depôt, and also *A Guide to the Holy Scriptures*, which I borrowed from a friend. Reading these with avidity, I found the Tourât and the Gospel to be in fact but one; then, indeed, I understood why, in the Coran, they are called *the Book*—one in spirit, one in object.

'Comparing the Scriptures with the Coran, I found them to agree in certain points, such as where, in the latter, Jesus is styled "the Spirit of God," and "the

¹ Sura v. (Maida), v. 75.

² *Ibid.* v. 77.

Word from Him," but to differ in others, as in the divinity of Christ, His death and atonement, etc. It distressed me beyond measure, seeing the Old and New Testaments to be at one in respect of these doctrines, and yet to find them denied in the Coran. For many days I thus remained cast down and distracted, afraid to let my doubts be known, and fell into a weak and sickly state. At last I made up my mind to visit a learned friend, Sheikh Rashid, to whom I confessed my perplexity arising out of the fact that whereas the Coran bears witness to the Bible, it contradicts some of its leading doctrines. After a long argument with Rashid, in which I quoted texts from the Coran and passages from the Bible (as the fifty-third of Isaiah) opposed thereto, the Sheikh frowned upon me as an apostate, and warning me of my danger, rose to leave me. I kissed his hand, and begging of him still to regard me as a friend, departed, marvelling at the force of prejudice which makes a man cling to what he has been born and bred in, and blind to all argument against it.

'After that I retired into my closet, imploring with tears that the Lord would guide me. Thus I continued to read and pray, often in great distress, tossed about like a tiny skiff upon the waves, until in Aly's house I heard the epistle in company with you. Then arose the dawn upon my heart, which, please God, will shine on unto the perfect day.'

This discourse, towards the close of which Mehmud himself was much affected, produced a deep impression on Soleiman, who thanked God that he

had been led to one who had passed through such deep waters. Then followed a long conversation, in which Mehmud answered various difficulties of his friend as to alleged discrepancies in the Bible (of which he said truly that there were far more in the Coran); showed that none were material; and that a Moslem must accept the Old and New Testaments as they stood in the seventh century, on the testimony of the Coran itself. Then they went over the wonderful terms in which Jesus is described in the Coran, involving attributes that could apply to none but to a Divine person.

'Strange,' said Mehmud, 'that our learned doctors should not have been struck by this. I have myself read the Coran over and over five hundred times and more, yet never thinking of Jesus with a tenth part of the reverence I regarded Mahomet with; and yet He is the Sun (the Coran itself being witness) around whom the prophets as stars revolve. In Him then let us trust as our Saviour and giver of eternal life. But having this faith, my friend, we must needs boldly avow it in the coming conference, not dogmatically, but bringing it out gradually by questions and discussion thereon.

'And now,' he said, 'let us call another of our company, Syed Omar al Haris, whom I have known as a thoughtful believer from his childhood, one who has often spoken discreetly concerning the Old and New Testaments, that he may stand by us; for a three-fold cord is not to be broken.'

So Omar came, and the three having unbosomed

their most secret thoughts, found themselves of one accord and one mind. Omar agreed to be with them in the coming assembly.

‘I am but weak,’ he said, ‘as ye see, compared with those of riper years, in faith and argument; but the Lord will be my Helper.’

Then they retired to their homes. And throughout the week the three repaired every evening to a knoll without the city, and talked these matters over.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND CONFERENCE.

AT the time appointed the twelve already mentioned came together in the house of Sheikh Aly, who, after a hearty welcome, opened the conference with a short address.

'They were met,' he said, 'a little company, seeking, amid the religious strife around them, to find the truth. Moslem contended angrily with Christian, and Christian with Moslem. Let them put bigotry aside, and discuss the serious question before them in a friendly spirit, seeking God's blessing, for His great name's sake.'

Then, at the wish of the assembly, the epistle was again read, some taking notes the while; and it was agreed to take up the argument point by point. Sheikh Ahmed accordingly proposed that the authenticity of the Old Testament should be first discussed. Omar Effendy and Syed Ibrahim were chosen as speakers to open the debate on either side.

The debate, accordingly, was opened by Omar, who asked how it was possible for the writer of the epistle to hold that the Tourât was unchanged, when he admitted that there were discrepancies in it? Ibrahim brought various arguments in reply. First, the Old Testament was full of denunciations against

the sins and apostacy of the Israelites. Had tampering been possible, such passages would have been the first to be altered by them, as well as the predictions of the Saviour. A similar argument he applied to Christians, in regard to passages opposed to such practices as saint worship and use of images and pictures. Thus the Western Church omitted the second Commandment from its service and ritual, and to make up the number divided the tenth into two; but did not venture to touch the text in the *Tourât* itself. So, likewise, with the testimony of Mahomet, who always spoke of Jews and Christians as 'people of the Book,' and of their 'Book' itself as 'perfect in all that is excellent, a light and a guide'—language implying its genuineness and authority, and entirely opposed to the imputations which they heard every day around them.

Omar now contended that differences in the various translations threw doubt upon the original text, whereat Abd ul Cadir, always on the alert, clapped his hands, with, 'Well done, Omar!' But Ibrahim recalled his attention to the fact that many versions already existed long before the rise of Islam, as the Septuagint in Egypt, the Syriac in their own land, and the Vulgate in the West. If discrepancies in these had affected the Divine teaching of the Scriptures, the Prophet would never have commended them as he did, nor enjoined their observance on the Jews and Christians. Omar replied that the Arabs had only the Hebrew text, and knew nothing of the various translations; to which Ibrahim answered that

such reasoning would impugn the knowledge which, as a prophet, Mahomet must have had of the discrepancies in the various translations. Omar, thus driven into a corner, was simple enough to suggest that even as regarded the original text, since the Prophet could not read, he might have been deceived as to its purity by the Jews of Medina. Abd ul Cadir, quick to see the mistake, cried out that he had made a slip in imputing lack of prophetic intuition to Mahomet. And Omar, now forced to give in, admitted that the Tourât must by every thoughtful and impartial person be admitted to be genuine and authoritative ; even as their Prophet had taught it to be. To say otherwise would be as if one cried to the day, ' O Night ! ' or addressed the full moon as ' O Canopus ! '

Hearing this, Hasan Effendy started up.

' Beware ! ' he cried, ' of admitting aught that reflects on the authority of the blessed Coran ! ' and so saying, he burst forth in praise thereof as the miraculous work of which it had been testified, that, " if men and genii had joined all together, they could not have produced a single verse the like thereof. " '

Mehmud.—' I am surprised at thee, O Hasan Effendy. Is it not the Coran itself which bears testimony both to the Old Testament and the New ? Wouldest thou forbid us to examine the books therein attested as inspired of God ? We have said no word in disparagement of the Coran, and must confine ourselves to the subject in hand. Listen to the debate, and then give judgment. Time now presses ;

let us go on to what remains. Who shall be the disputants?’

Thereupon it was agreed that Hasan Effendy should lead the attack, and Soleiman reply. The Effendy was at first disinclined; but at last agreeing, he proceeded to controvert the argument built on the fulfilment of prophecy, by suggesting the interpolation of prophetic passages after the event. This objection Soleiman met by showing that some of the prophesied events were of a nature that must have been displeasing to the Jews, such as their punishment for idolatry—passages which they would have been the last to fabricate; and again, by the fact that copies of the original text and of the Septuagint translation had already been spread over the world long before the event, such as the destruction of Jerusalem and other great cities in the East. Soleiman illustrated this view at great length from the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as those of Moses, showing the fulfilment of predicted events, first in the captivity, and then in the dispersion of the Israelites, that once glorious people, now the off-scouring of nations—a manifest token, even to the present day, of the truth of revelation before the eyes of all.

This address of Soleiman had a wonderful effect upon the audience, who sat for a time in silent reflection on what they had heard,—all excepting Abd ul Cadir, who arose and exclaimed against the danger they were shutting their eyes to, of slipping away altogether from Islam.

‘Have a care!’ he cried; ‘ye cannot receive the

Bible now in the hands of Christians without rejecting the Coran. Beware, before it be too late !'

'What !' replied Mehmud ; 'dost thou shrink from the testimony of the Coran itself, and from the Scriptures confirmed by the same, and by so many signs from heaven ? What answer shall we give our Lord if we cast them aside ? Now, as our debate has led us to be satisfied in respect of the integrity of the Tourât, we must proceed to consider what the epistle says with regard to the Gospel.'

Upon which Sheikb Aly arose and said that he quite agreed with Mehmud, but that as the time was now far gone, the further discussion had better be adjourned till the Sabbath following, by which day they would have had ample time for further reflection. So he brought out a table and spread refreshments thereon, of which, when the guests had partaken, they departed, all of them thankful and satisfied, excepting only Abd ul Cadir, who took his homeward way sorrowful and downcast at the turn the debate was taking.

CHAPTER IV.

DANGER THREATENS.

THAT very night Abd ul Cadir went off to his Master, Sheikh Nasir ud Din, a learned doctor, filled with bigotry and hatred against Christianity. To him he related what had passed at the assembly, and how that, when his heart was stirred within him at all he saw there of the danger to Islam, he resolved to come and tell it to his guide and master.

‘Is it true, my son?’ cried Nasir, clapping his hands, and excited like a lion; ‘is it all true?’ Assured that it was, he sat silent for a moment, stroking his beard, and lost in thought. Then looking up, he said, ‘Alas! alas! it is indeed a sad business. But be of good cheer, my son. I will show them their folly, the baselessness of Christianity, and the adamant strength of Islam. Then, if they yield not, I will, with the Lord’s help, make such an onset as shall force them back into the faith. But, my son, why didst thou not tell me all this earlier, that I might at once have crushed the abominable conspiracy in its cradle? These men have been my enemies ever since our school days, and that because I was their superior, and more favoured by our master; and yet I have ever sought to do them good.’

Abd ul Cadir coloured at the blame implied.

'I stayed to see the end,' he said, 'resolved that if any evil did transpire, I would lay it at once before my Master; and I now beg of him to pardon the delay.'

Nasir.—'The Lord preserve thee, my son! I accept thine excuse. And now let us call my brother's son, Al Haj Cadûr, a witless fellow to be sure, but one that will serve my purpose better than a wiser and a graver man.'

So Al Haj was called, who, when told of what had happened, stormed like a madman, and swore that he would raise the city, young and old, against the vile apostates. He was hurrying off with this intent, when his uncle stopped him, saying that first everything must be done that lay in their power to recall their brethren to the truth. So he dictated a letter to his scribe, addressed to the perverts, and sent it off in the morning to Aly's house by the hand of his son. He began the letter by casting contempt on the epistle, and ridicule on the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and atonement. Asserting the corruption of the Bible, he dwelt on the danger of denying the Coran, and warned them of the risks they were sure to run by falling into apostacy. He offered himself to join their assembly, and discuss with them the pestilent treatise that had led them astray; and ended with a eulogy on the Prophet and his revelation. Beseeching them not to rush headlong into destruction, he begged that he might be favoured with an answer.

Early next morning Sheikh Aly was startled by

Nasir's son, who, entering the house, pulled this letter from his pocket and placed it in Aly's hand. Well knowing the intolerance of the writer, he but glanced at the contents, and then bade the bearer to thank his father and tell him that, after he had shown the letter to his friends, he hoped shortly to send a reply. So the son returned and told his father, who said,—

‘Good! We shall see what will come of it.’

As for Sheikh Aly, on the messenger leaving, he retired into his chamber, and as he read the letter over, smiled and frowned alternately. Seeing the bitterness, clothed as it was in words of friendship, that lurked in every sentence, he thought thus within himself: ‘He warns us against being led astray, as if the Lord would suffer those that seek His face to be led astray. God forbid! For is it not promised that “the meek will He teach His way”? And his threats of persecution! I foresee it all; for does not history tell us of the trials awaiting the confessor? But the Lord will give blessing and strength to bear the cross. How hard and cold is the world! The Lord save me from the hatred of man, and give me light and grace to hold on unto the end!’ Then, as he left his closet: ‘Poor Nasir ud Din! How dare he speak so of the epistle? As if he could write anything like it in defence of Islam! But so goes the proverb, “Every youth swears by his father.”’

The story now turns to Syed Ibrahim. When he retired from the second conference, he entered his house happy and content at the turn the debate had taken. Then he sat down, and opening his Coran on

one side, with the Tourât and the Gospel on the other, he went over all the passages he could remember in the Old Testament containing predictions of the Christ, then those in the Gospel which signified their fulfilment, and lastly, the parallel passages in the Coran bearing upon the same. Then he fell upon the device of copying these out, side by side, in three parallel columns, on a great sheet or table. Having finished this table, he looked it over again and again with satisfaction, and was both delighted and surprised at the correspondence of the three columns one with the other, and especially at the clear testimony of the Coran given to the previous revelation and the person of the Christ.

‘How can our Doctors,’ he thought within himself, ‘read the Coran over and over without seeing the supremacy there ascribed to the Messiah? And here have I myself been doing just the same thing! Thanks to the wanderer’s Guide, who at the last hath led me into the right way!’¹

Then he arose, and went table in hand to his friend Soleiman, who told him he had just been over

¹ The table is given by our author complete, with all the quotations in full, but need not be repeated here, as the various passages are fully brought out in the discussions which follow. There are six series of texts. The first relates to Emmanuel, etc., Isaiah vii. and ix.; 2nd col., Matthew and Luke i.; 3rd col., Sura Al Imran, v. 45, and S. Mariyam, v. 20. The second series is on ‘the Word;’ the third, on the promised blessing to mankind from the seed of Abraham and line of David. The fourth on the death, and the fifth on the resurrection of Christ. The table, printed in bold letters, might be usefully hung up in Christian reception rooms.

the same ground, and was now convinced that Jesus was the Son of God and Saviour of the world. He praised Ibrahim for his fearless and impartial attitude in the debate of the previous day, and marvelled at his rapid growth in the knowledge of Scripture. Soleiman, much pleased with the table, then entered on a long discourse with his friend on the precious truths of the Bible. Men stumbled over them as unperceived jewels in their path ; or as precious simples in a field, that would cure the fatal disease of him who trampled heedlessly on them ; or as a box of precious ointment thrown carelessly away. Then as to the varying testimony of the Coran, though some texts did deny the Divinity of our Lord, it signified the less, as others clearly admitted it, like those in which He is termed 'the Word' and 'Spirit of God.' In fact, the Coran, as it were, showed the glory of Christ on one side, and hid it on the other ; just as the new moon discloses but a tiny streak of the shining disc, while one could trace dimly and darkly the shadowy outline of the full orb, well aware of the lustre thus concealed.

'And so, as to the objections against the atonement, are we,' he said, 'to sit in judgment on what the Lord reveals of Himself, and not come with meek and lowly heart to learn His will? Does the patient refuse the medicine prescribed for him till he knows its nature? Rather, assured of the physician's skill and faithfulness, does he not without scruple follow his instructions? Even so with us ; we must come to the Divine Physician and accept the remedy,

take the blessed Son as our Saviour, and refrain from asking as to the *how* or the *wherefore*.'

And so, Ibrahim being delighted with the fervour of Soleiman, the two sat long together in loving discourse. Then they took the table with them to show to their other friends, who were all delighted with it, and agreed that Ibrahim should be their spokesman at the next meeting, which would be the last, the subject being the authenticity of the Gospel.

CHAPTER V.

THIRD CONFERENCE.

WHEN the time appointed for the third assembly came round, the former company, with exception only of Abd ul Cadir, came together at the house of Sheikh Aly, who, according to custom, opened the debate. He told them first of the letter from Sheikh Nasir ud Din, who had always been known for his intolerance of free inquiry. He had, no doubt, been informed of their proceedings by Abd ul Cadir, and his witless nephew, Haj Cadûr, whose ravings people mistook for bravery, might very likely have already bruited the matter abroad. The letter was then read aloud, at the contents of which the company was much moved and concerned. Omar al Haris arose and said,—

‘Sheikh Nasir has in this letter exhorted us to “stand to the truth, at whatever risk.” That, at any rate, is sound advice, though not in the sense intended.’

Then, at some length, he dwelt on the reasons for continued endeavour to find out what the will of the Lord was, and then, at whatever cost, hold by the same, regardless of results, seeing that their eternal welfare depended thereon. He closed with a prayer that the Lord would strengthen them to

hold firmly by the pillar of truth. Others followed in the same strain; the good Lord would not forsake them, striving after His will, whatever might be the pains and losses in store for them.

The company then proceeded to the question of the day, the genuineness, namely, and authority of the New Testament. Ibrahim was the speaker. He produced his table, which was duly passed round and perused by each. Then he set forth his subject at some length. The blessed Gospels, he said, needed no extraneous testimony; but nevertheless an inestimable service had been rendered by the Coran, which so confirmed the previous revelation, and glorified Jesus, the son of Mary, that the Moslem had no option left but, in consistency with the same, to accept the New Testament with all its teaching. The whole company, after further debate, agreed that the genuineness of the Gospels had been made so clear as to admit of no further question; and so, after conference and mutual exhortation, they one and all of them confessed their faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind.

Sheikh Aly then arose. Before taking up Sheikh Nasir ud Din's letter, he wished, as that would be their last meeting, to say how he thanked God for these three conferences, and for the spirit that had guided their discussions. There had been no happier hours in his life. He then reviewed, at considerable length, the argument for the Gospel, quoting largely from the Coran in corroboration. What the Coran told us was indeed only as the drop of water

for the thirsty man, which but increased his longing for the stream, whereof to drink and be satisfied; and the grand merit of the Coran was to point the thirsty one to the stream of life that flowed from the Saviour; all which he illustrated at great length from the Coran itself. God's justice, he went on to say, is satisfied by the atonement of Christ. Through His blood we have peace with God; for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

'Let us then,' he concluded, 'cast all our care upon Him, bless Him for giving us the light of the knowledge of His Son in our hearts, and lay firm hold on His salvation. God be thanked for sending us that epistle, which guided our steps towards the light, and grant the author thereof a good reward! My friends, let us fight the good fight of faith. They may persecute and separate us here, may even put us to the death; but they cannot hurt us beyond the grave, and we shall all meet in the blessed kingdom above. He that soweth in tears shall reap in joy. Now the gracious Lord, who hath called us into the kingdom of His Son, and guided our feet into the way of peace, preserve and stablish us unto every good work! He is our support and all-sufficient defence.'

Sheikh Aly shed tears as he ended this address, which touched the hearts of all, and many wept. The company thanked him for his stirring words of faith and love, and all expressed their resolve to hold on, even to the death.

Then taking up Sheikh Nasir ud Din's letter, they commissioned Aly to draft a reply such as should go in the name of them all. This done, the assembly broke up, after hearing and approving the despatch, which ran as follows :—

'We thank you for your concern lest we should fall into apostacy and its perils. God forbid we should wander from the straight path ; rather, we trust to be guided into the right way. We have been led to inquire whether the Tourât and Gospel are genuine or corrupt ; and after careful deliberation, are convinced that they are genuine. We had supposed them to have been corrupt and interpolated ; but we find them to be, in point of fact, the very same Scriptures which are attested in the Coran, and there said to be "a light and a guide from our Lord." If thou wilt honour us with thy presence, we shall lay the proofs before thee, if haply thou and thy fellows might be partakers with us in the same blessing. For ourselves, we cannot give up the truth in which we have found rest and peace, even with the prospect of trial and persecution before us. Ours, indeed, are but poor bodies, liable to pain and suffering. But we have counted the cost, and prefer the will of God to that of man ; peace of conscience to worldly honour ; and even death, with the favour of God, to life, if it be with His displeasure. We are grieved at the threats in thy letter. Suppose, as thou thinkest, that we have gone wrong, is it right to vex and punish us for it? and not, rather, recognising every man's right of private judgment, endeavour to correct our errors?

For we are ready to have them pointed out to us by reason and argument. If thou wilt condescend to this, well ; else we are in the Lord's hands, and He is the best of helpers.

‘Thy faithful brethren,

‘ALY and his COMPANIONS.’

1 *Moharram*, 57.

CHAPTER VI.

INTIMIDATION AND ALARM.

NOW Sheikh Nasir ud Din and Abd ul Cadir having noised the matter abroad among their friends, there had gathered together that same night in the Sheikh's house an excited throng of sheikhs, divines, professors and others, awaiting impatiently Aly's answer. When it came and was read aloud, they were thrown into a storm of passion at the little company having gone clean over to the Christian apostacy.

'How Satan,' they cried, 'hath hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes!' And they ceased not to shout the Takbîr — 'Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar!' at the pitch of their voice, bowing themselves low the while in prayer and adoration. Calming down after a time, they fell to discussing what they should do—whether agree to the conference asked for by the perverts, immediately report the scandal to the court, or once again reiterate their warning.

At length Abd ul Karîm, calmer than the rest, begged to be heard.

'Aly and his comrades,' he said, 'are men of learning, discernment, and breeding; some of them, indeed, for knowledge and ability, in the very foremost

rank. They have become, moreover, adepts in the argument, and, supposing we were to begin a discussion with them, might confuse us by dates, quotations and such-like, gotten from their Christian friends, which we might not know how to answer; and so the result might very possibly be to carry off other lukewarm believers. Better not stir up slumbering embers, or the end may be worse than the beginning. Rather let us send a couple of our number to address them friendlily, without entering into controversy, and urge them to return. It will be a last appeal, and if it should fail, then, in the interests of Islam, we must report them to the authorities.' This was no sooner agreed to than the speaker himself, with another, was started off on the forlorn errand, the whole assembly crying after them,—

'Go in the name of the Lord! The Lord speed you! We shall not stir from hence till ye return.'

We go back now to Sheikh Aly's house.

After the letter had been despatched and the company had broken up, Soleiman bethought him that something might transpire during the night to their risk, in consequence of the letter; so he went back to Aly and advised that their friends should be recalled for consultation. Aly agreed;—

'But let it be in Sheikh Mehmud's house,' he said, 'and I shall be there myself before supper.'

So the company again assembled there, about the first hour of the night, and began to talk the matter over. Some said that their enemies had no doubt already spread abroad the tidings, to stir up

an uproar against them ; others, that they had very probably given notice to the authorities, who might take them up that very night.

Syed Ibrahim went calmly over all the possibilities. He agreed that their defection from Islam had very likely been noised all over the city, and that it might go hard with them in a land where free inquiry was not tolerated. Anyhow, he did not think that the authorities would lay hands on them until, at any rate, they first had warning.

Sheikh Ahmed spoke. He thought it quite possible they might be taken up that very night, or in the morning. 'Suppose,' he continued, 'that they decreed our banishment or death, are we ready to stand firm? or, to save ourselves, should we be tempted to recant or leave our faith? Christian resolve, my friends, standeth not in knowledge, but in power from above to bear punishment and contempt ; for such hath ever been a leading evidence of the faith, as Christ Himself bore the burden for us, even to the death. Shall we then not follow after His example, and with Him be partakers of the reward? "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me," He said, "and of My word, in this evil generation, of him shall I be ashamed before the angels of My Father in heaven;" and again, "Whosoever doth not take up his cross day by day, and follow Me, is not worthy of Me." Nor is this possible for any, unless he be ready, for his sake and the gospel's, to do so unto death. Should we, instead, prefer our ease and pleasure, it were a fatal error, and departing from our Lord. But if we resolve to live for Him, instead

of for ourselves, He will support us through all our troubles to the end.'

At this appeal there was a general response to such effect as this:—

'We cannot draw back from the way of life in which, in the name of the Lord, we have entered. We are weak, but the Lord will strengthen and support us.'

On hearing this Mehmud arose and said,—

'My soul exceedingly rejoiceth. What is this but the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, even as the love of Christ, who gave Himself for us—a love beyond conception? Is it then a great thing that we, for His name's sake, should bear ignominy and persecution? Even as one of His apostles hath said: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." My dear friends, let us but trust in the Lord, and He will be our Helper.'

He was yet speaking, when they heard one knocking at the door of the hall in which they sat. Mehmud stopped, and opening the door, was told by his servant that two persons stood without.

'One of them is Sheikh Abd ul Karim,' he said, 'who wants to see Sheikh Aly and yourself.'

Whereupon all exclaimed that it was just as Syed Ibrahim had led them to expect. Mehmud then bade his servant let the strangers in. They entered with the ordinary friendly salutation, whereupon the company arose and invited them to be seated. So, after the customary greetings, and after coffee had been

handed round, Abd ul Karim opened his mouth as follows :—

‘Dear friends ! we have been sent by your brethren Sheikh Nasir ud Din and a company of others, who are much concerned and grieved that you, chief men of the city, and pillars of the faith, should have been beguiled by the idolatrous Christians to follow their corrupt imaginations. After long deliberation, therefore, they have sent us, a friendly deputation, with a brotherly warning. We are not come to argue. A word for the wise sufficeth. Think for a moment of our grief at being separated in faith and worship from men with whom in times past we have taken sweet counsel together ; not only our grief, but the grief of the whole community ; and expel from your hearts the evil thoughts which the devil hath cast into them. Return, and let us, as brethren, end our days in peace under the shadow of Allah and his Prophet, and with us, at the last, reach the blessed paradise through which living fountains flow, and there are pleasures for evermore.’

After entreating them with many such passionate words, his companion followed up the appeal ;—

‘If it had been the dregs of the people it had not so much signified,’ he said ; ‘but ye have been our chiefs and our guides—the salt of the land ; and now that ye should become a breach and a calamity amongst us ! There is no believer but will regard the lapse with horror and dismay. Beware, lest thus acting, ye lose both this world and the next. I adjure you in the name of your brethren, to return

from the path of destruction to the ways of peace that lead to the gardens of delight. The Lord is merciful, and will surely pardon your offence. Give us to carry back an answer that shall gladden the hearts of them that sent us.'

Sheikh Aly made reply ;—

'They were thankful,' he said, 'for the kindness of their friends in sending them, but they would be still more indebted if, instead of bidding them leave the path they had entered on, they would point out wherein it erred and led astray. A plaintiff was not rejected till his complaint was proved groundless, nor a defendant condemned till his evidence had been heard. Equally unjust was it to threaten them with the law until they had heard their reasons. Suppose they recanted, it would be but a changing of the outward garb, their conviction still remaining. Where, then, would they be in that day when neither son nor father would be of any avail?'

Then, after briefly noticing the testimony of the Coran to the Tourât and the Gospel, and to Jesus as the 'Word' and 'Spirit of God,' he concluded :—

'This, then, is my faith, according to the testimony of the Lord, and I count not my life dear unto me now that I have known my Saviour. Nor do I ween that I am bolder than these my brethren ; but they shall speak for themselves.'

All then answered : 'The faith of Sheikh Aly is our faith, and his confession our confession. The Lord is our help, and He is the best of helpers.'

On this Sheikh Mehmud arose and said,—

‘We ask you, dear friends, to think over what Sheikh Aly hath been saying. Why should you seek after our destruction and the overthrow of our homes? We have not injured you at all, nor yet the government nor the people. Let us live the rest of our lives in that freedom of conscience which is the gift of God to His creatures. If ye be pleased to enter into discussion with us, we shall give our reasons to the best of our ability; but we cannot disregard the voice from within, that calls us to decline your demand. Have compassion on us, as ye would yourselves have compassion from the Lord.’

The company confirmed the words of both speakers and prayed that their brethren, giving up their design of reporting them to the Waly, would rather enter into argument with them, either by word or letter.

The deputation replied: ‘We shall carry back your answer to our comrades; but we see not how they can comply with your request. We were sent to warn you, and lo, you begin to preach,—seeking, forsooth, to drag us into the same pit into which ye have yourselves fallen! We can but again warn you of the evils and calamities before you.’

The company made reply: ‘We trust in the Lord. If calamities do overtake us, He will give us strength to bear them.’

On this the visitors arose, and with an angry scowl departed.

When they had gone, the little company sat some time in silence; then they began to speak one with another, and to say that it behoved them to pray to

God for protection from the dangers arising all around. Before doing so, Sheikh Ahmed, taking up the Gospels, read aloud the thirteenth of John and three following chapters. All were soothed by the comforting words of our Saviour, so suitable to their present trial. Then they knelt down, while Sheikh Mehmud prayed ;—

He began by praising God for the gift of His Son, and for bringing them out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel. 'We beseech Thee,' he cried, 'to strengthen our weak hearts to bear the burdens before us, so that our walk and conversation may be as becometh Thy word, and the glory of Thy blessed name. Have mercy on our neighbours, who have thought to turn us from Thy ways by threats. Enlighten their souls, O Lord, as Thou hast enlightened us ; guide them as Thou hast guided us.' Then he prayed for the government, the Sultan, their Waly, his council and advisers, that they might rule in righteousness and the fear of the Lord ; and for themselves, that they might be vessels fit for the Master's use ; and ended with ascription of praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.¹

They rose from their knees with lightened countenances. Then Mehmud, bringing forward a table with refreshments, besought them all to partake of the same, for it was now past midnight. So they all ate a little, and then departed to their homes in good cheer, praising the Lord for His goodness to them.

¹ This is but the bare outline of a beautiful and fervent prayer, as given in the original.

CHAPTER VII.

BROUGHT BEFORE THE COURT, AND SENT TO PRISON.

WHEN Abd ul Karim and his companion returned with the report of what had passed, the assembly still waiting in Sheikh Nasir's house gave vent in wild language to their feelings. The idea of further attempt at reclamation was abandoned. 'As well try cure for the palsy,' cried some. 'Plague take them!' said others; 'why did they not take our warning?' Others: 'They are fallen so low that there is no use trying to raise them.' But the most popular cry was, 'When they get into trouble, and are well punished, they will soon come round.'

Abd ul Karim, hearing it, interrupted. He knew better. 'Indeed they won't; and even if some, after falling into trouble, were to recant, the most will persist in their heresy, cut them into a thousand pieces!'

Just then Haj Cadûr, who had been in the country, came in, and learning what had passed, fell into a towering passion, stamped and raged;—

'Allah Akbar!' he shouted at the pitch of his voice. 'I marvel at your patience with these fellows. Away with them! away to perdition, as they deserve, abusing our faith, blaspheming our Prophet, denying the Coran, sowing sedition in the city; and yet ye give them space to spread the plague. Verily, for this sort there is nought but the two-edged sword!'

Sheikh Dervesh (raising his turban from his brow

and stroking his beard excitedly).—‘By my life, he hits the mark! the Haj is your man!’

Haj.—‘Yes, send me; I’ll raise the city. I’ll lay hands on them at once, this very night, lest they get off in the dark.’

Abd ul Rahim Omeyyah. — ‘Softly, my friend! Your jealousy for Islam is good, but your words are foolish. What chance is there of laying hands on chief men like these? And if we could, it would at the present moment be the height of folly, for it would split the city into parties, and cause fatal frays, for which we should be held responsible. It is a delicate thing to lay hold of men like these perverts, men of birth and honour. My advice is to report the matter early in the morning to the Cazee and the Mufty, and then at midday to lay it publicly before the authorities to whom it appertains. So shall we avoid raising a disturbance, whereof we know not what the end might be.’

This advice was approved by all. Nasir ud Din and Abd ul Cadir were chosen as a deputation to the Cazee; and the rest were to be ready at midday, to go in a body as complainants and lay their case before the Waly as he sat in court. This arranged, the company dispersed.

Early the following morning, Nasir ud Din and Abd ul Cadir visited the Cazee. Courteously received in his hall of audience, they told their story, mingling with it much invective, to inflame his mind against the accused. He sat grave and silent as they spoke. When they had finished he said,—

‘If this thing be as ye represent, it is most serious and distressing ; but ye will not take it amiss if I say that the learning and piety of these men is against it : there must surely be some exaggeration or mistake.’

‘Nay, by the life and head of our Prophet ! it is every word as we have said ; and thou wilt thyself shortly hear of it all in court.’

‘Alas ! and alas !’ cried the Cazee. ‘La houl ! We can but seek for refuge in the Lord. What do you now purpose doing ?’

‘We purpose telling the Mufty now ; and after that the matter will come in court before the Waly.’

Cazee.—‘No need to tell the Mufty, for I shall see him shortly myself. Bring it, by all means, before the governor ; but meanwhile keep it quietly to yourselves, lest it spread abroad in the city, and stir up commotion there.’

‘It shall be so, your honour ;’ which having said, they received permission to retire.

Now the Cazee was a wise and prudent man, and withal kindly-hearted and compassionate. He went at once to the Mufty, and having told him all : ‘We must face the difficulty,’ he said, ‘which is all the greater because of the distinguished position of these men, related, some of them, to ourselves. If the case be as we have heard, then even suppose the citizens to put up with it from feelings of old friendship, yet the Waly and his court are strangers to us, and would feel no compunction in putting them to death. They have enemies, too, as thou knowest, who, seeing them in danger, will not be slow to get up any sort of

evidence to condemn them. And how, then, should we bear to see their orphans and their widows? Ah! it is sad. What sayest thou? Alas! alas!’

He was much moved as he spoke; and the Mufty observed his eyes bedewed with tears; whereat somewhat surprised, he said,—

‘Recover thyself, my brother! It is a dreadful business, without doubt; and I, too, am myself terribly distressed thereat. But it is in God’s hands. We are Moslems, and our office demands the utmost firmness, as well in support of the faith, as in the administration of justice. We must not, and cannot, depart from the law.’

‘True,’ replied the Cazee; ‘but I had rather resign office, and beg my bread, a dervish staff in hand, the wide world over, than have any part in the death-warrant of Sheikh Aly or Sheikh Mehmud. Is it a light matter, my brother? Nay, but I hope and trust that by your help and persuasion they may yet be delivered from these delusive heresies. And so,’ stretching his arms towards heaven, he cried, ‘O Lord, I ask this of Thee; and thou, my friend, thou wilt assist me therein?’

Mufty.—‘Indeed, it will be one of my first duties to do so.’

Cazee.—‘And if all should fail, what will the end be? Oh that I knew!’

Mufty.—‘We need not disturb ourselves with that just now. If they do hold by their errors, the best thing will be to exile them to some place where no Moslems dwell.’

Cazee.—‘Yes, that would be best ; but who knows if we shall be able ? May the good Lord guide us !’

So saying, they separated, and about the third hour of the day again met in the court-room of the Waly’s palace. His Excellency, as usual, had taken his seat on the chair of state, when suddenly the hall was filled by a crowd of Doctors, professors and divines, with Sheikh Nasir ud Din and his company at their head. The Waly and his council were surprised at the unexpected inroad, but after the usual salutation his Excellency bade them to be seated. They declined until they had made known the alarming matter which had brought them there. The Waly’s heart beat quick.

‘Alarming matter ?’ he cried ; ‘what is it ?’

Cazee.—‘If it please my lord, let the court be cleared of Christians and strangers, and let none remain but members of your Highness’ council and officers of state ; for the matter is indeed of serious import.’

So the Waly gave orders, and the court was cleared. The crowd of unlooked-for visitors, at his Excellency’s repeated command, then took their seats.

‘Now,’ said the Waly to them, ‘what is this alarming matter that has brought you to my presence this day ?’

Thereupon Abd ul Cadir got up, and after fulsome praise of the Waly as the most excellent of rulers, proceeded thus :—

‘Regarding your Excellency to be the defender of the faith, it has become our painful duty to represent to you that Sheikh Aly and a company with

him' (naming in all eleven persons) 'have gone over to the Christian religion, denying the Prophet and the Coran. The cause thereof is a long-standing friendship between Sheikh Abd ul Hady and a Christian of Aleppo. This man, some time ago, wrote an epistle to the Sheikh, which he calls *The truth of Christianity and falsity of all other Religions*. This epistle was read before the company aforesaid, with which was associated also your humble servant. These all inclined towards the heresy, excepting only myself. With all my power I combated the false teaching of the epistle, basing my plea upon the authority of the Prophet and the Coran; and I implored them to cast it aside, pointing out the subtle poison of polytheism and idolatry it contained. As they gave no heed to my words, I said within myself, I will wait to see the end. But when I found them going entirely over, I left them, and hurried to my master, Sheikh Nasir ud Din. Thereupon he wrote a letter warning them of their danger, and entreating them to abandon their fallacies, couched in friendly terms. But they answered rudely, and openly avowed their perversion. Here, my lord, is the letter in Sheikh Aly's own handwriting.' And he handed it to the dragoon, who placed it before the Waly.

It was about to be read out, when Abd ul Cadir asked permission first to finish his story, which being graciously accorded, he went on as follows :—

'Notwithstanding this insolent and hopeless answer Sheikh Nasir ud Din thought it best, instead of at once bringing the complaint before your Excellency, to call

together certain of the leading citizens—these now in court—and take counsel with them. It was resolved first to send two of their number as a deputation,—they are now before your Excellency,—with assurances of our distress, and endeavour to reclaim them by loving words and earnest entreaty. It was all in vain. They confessed themselves Christians—believers in the divinity, incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. And more than this, they even sought to persuade the two visitors to join them in their apostacy! On their return we saw no alternative but to report the sad affair to the government, since it cannot but affect authority and endanger public tranquillity. This is what we have to lay before my lord Effendy, who will deal with it according to his most excellent wisdom and judgment.’

The Waly then asked the rest of the visitors whether the affair was as Abd ul Cadir had stated, and on their replying that it was entirely so, the dragoman by his command read out the letter in the ears of the assembly. They were all shocked and astounded at such words proceeding from any that called themselves fellow-citizens, and their faces flushed with anger. The Waly scowled scornfully; then, turning with a courteous greeting to the body of the citizens who were sitting with him in council, he asked whether they knew the handwriting to be that of Sheikh Aly. Assured that it was, he called the captain of his guard;—

‘Take this list,’ he said, ‘and bring these men before me into court.’

So they were summoned ; and as they entered, all were amazed at seeing the little company, some of them aged men, and others amongst the most distinguished of their fellow-citizens for learning and piety ; and still more, at their brave and fearless attitude. The Waly frowned upon them, but bade them to be seated. They excused themselves, but on the command being repeated once and again, they obeyed. Then his Excellency bade the dragoman to read the letter over again, which he did in a loud voice.

‘Who wrote this letter?’ asked the Waly.

Whereupon Sheikh Aly answered : ‘It was I, my lord Effendy.’

And all marvelled at the brave reply.

‘Art thou, then, a Christian?’

‘Yes, my lord, by the grace of God.’

‘Silence!’ shouted the Waly. ‘Thou idiot, for shame! Sayest thou that *by the grace of God* I have become a Christian? Grace and mercy! That be far from thee!’ And, turning with a scornful laugh to the court,—‘See how this fool thinks they have, *by the grace of God*, apostatized!’ Then addressing the rest of the little company,—‘And you, too, have ye been led astray like him?’

‘Not led astray, my lord; but guided to the truth which is in the Tourât and the Gospel, the Coran itself being witness.’

Waly.—‘Then doth not the divine Coran suffice?’

They made answer : ‘How can it be so, since the Coran itself leadeth to the Tourât and Gospel as to a revelation “of everything that is excellent, a guide, and

a light, and an evidence from the Lord"? It was this testimony, my lord, that led us to the study of the Scriptures, and acceptance of that which is revealed therein.'

'Out upon you!' cried the Waly. 'As for the Gospel, it has been shamefully tampered with—even calling Jesus, son of Mary, both God and man; and pretending that this so-called God, after being crucified and buried, rose again the third day; and asserting that by His disgraceful death He hath cleansed His followers from their sins! Could any grosser fabrication be imagined, or affront against the Deity, or more glaring apostacy than this? No, by my life! God forbid it! What could have led you into this abyss of depravity? I protest that, instead of worshipping the one true God, ye have become idolaters and polytheists. Learned men like you, at the weak and silly argument of an infidel, to be thus suddenly led astray! Shame on you! brave warriors turning your backs at the first onset of the enemy! Now, I command you to turn from this accursed heresy to the true faith—the faith of your fathers and forefathers. Confess your fault in the face of this assembly. Amend your ways. So shall the Lord have mercy on you. Obey your Waly's command, and so it shall be well with you.'

Sheikh Aly.—'Wilt thou hear me a little of thy clemency?'

Waly.—'Speak on.'

Aly.—'Let your Excellency then know that we have studied this question of the Book with anxiety and care, and that we find no trace therein either of

change or of corruption. That which your Excellency has named as proof of impious tampering is in reality nothing but the truth from God, the purpose of the Tourât and the substance of the Gospel. Of that we have most thoroughly satisfied ourselves. In every matter we obey your Excellency, saving that of our faith ; for, as the Waly well knows, that is a matter between man and his God ; and it behoveth us to obey God rather than man.'

At these words the Waly, unable to restrain himself, called out in a fierce voice, 'Silence, wretch!' and forthwith ordered the captain of his guard to carry off the little company to prison, with irons on their legs. As this was being done, the Cazee approached the Waly, and asked that they might first be brought back again into court, in order that, if it pleased his Excellency, the influential gathering of citizens present might speak kindly with them, if haply they might yet be persuaded to return to the faith. His Excellency consented, and on their re-appearance motioned to the Cazee to address them.

'By the Viceroy's command,' he said, 'I am about to speak with you, my brothers. Be seated according to your several rank, as usual, and hearken to me, for the city is your own, and so is the government for the welfare of yourselves and of your households. And now this assembly, by permission of his Excellency, receives you with all honour and welcome. We cannot bear to think that our worthy fellow-citizens should be led astray by such delusions. We trust that these have been dispelled by the solemn warning which our

Waly, in his grief at what fell from your spokesman, felt bound to administer. Now sit ye down in comfort, and thank his Excellency for the interest he has taken in you.'

So they sat down in their midst, with every mark of honour and respect. The Governor himself smiled graciously upon them, and ordered coffee and refreshments to be served, of which when all had partaken, his Excellency addressed them with every mark of cordiality and friendship:—

'Learned fathers, brethren in the faith, my children for whom I am responsible to our gracious sovereign! How can I behold subjects of rank and learning like you leave the true faith for paths of infidelity? My heart is sore pained for the danger ye are in, and also for the fear lest your example should lead others astray. Had it been men from the vulgar throng, the matter were comparatively easy; but you, the chiefest amongst us and most learned, it becometh a more serious affair than I can bear withal to think of. I adjure you by Allah and by his Prophet, and by his Shadow upon earth—the Commander of the Faithful, and myself his Viceroy, and these your brethren, and by all that is dear to you in the peace of your homes, that ye rejoin the faith of your fathers. Turn the bitterness of my heart into joy, and this, the darkest of days for us all, into a day of light and rejoicing.'

These fair-spoken words had an evident effect upon the little company, who remained silent, with down-cast looks; and this raised the hopes of the assembly.

'For, see,' said they one to another, 'and behold

how gentle words are more effective than angry threats with men of culture and breeding like these.'

Then the Cazeer asked leave to speak.

'Speak on,' replied his Excellency; 'and after thee any others of our brethren in this assembly who may desire to say a word; for are not we met for this very purpose? And truly I know none other weightier than to persuade these our friends to return from their wanderings to the fold of the faith.'

All praised the gracious words of his Excellency, and prayed for his long life and prosperity.

Then the Cazeer opened his lips as follows:—

'Your hearts must be overflowing with gratitude at the condescension of the Waly, and his tender anxiety, as of a father for his children. It is no time this for argument and discussion; rather it is a time for free unbending intercourse, forgetful for the moment of rank and dignity. My brethren, let us call to mind the happy days we have spent together, joining in worship in the house of prayer, and in religious and social conference, holding sweet intercourse on the welfare of our dear ones, and of the land at large; how your own addresses have from time to time affected our hearts, and how, through your example, help and influence, our city has become a pattern to the world. Will ye, by a sudden reversal, blight all these happy fruits?—and such a reversal! Nay, nay, dear friends. A baseless, impious heresy like this shall never beguile such men as you. I appeal to you by all the claims of friendship, and adjure you by the Lord, to come forth from the wilderness whither

ye have wandered. And now, in this lordly assemblage, and in presence of this our gracious Waly, let us lay aside all ceremony, and unbend in such pleasant intercourse as that of friends who, after long separation, meet again, and change our sorrow into joy. Disregard not the call of his Excellency, made with such wonderful grace and condescension, nor despise the invitation of your friends. The Lord be gracious to us and you, and gladden all our hearts !'

Then the Mufty spoke. He enlarged on the grief this affair had caused him. The first word of it was like a bolt from heaven on his head, like an arrow barbed with fire at his heart. Companions of his childhood, friends of his daily life, parted thus suddenly in faith, in creed, in worship and in future hopes ; bitterer to the soul than death itself ! As he prayed them to soften and return, his eyes filled with tears, and his voice faltered with emotion ;—

'Ye will return,' he cried, 'to the faith of your fathers, the way of peace and happiness. And if ye will have argument, let it be hereafter, private and alone. But now, in presence of this royal gathering, accept his Excellency's gracious call and the invitation of your brethren. And now let us, according to our wont, pass the time in social intercourse and happy relaxation. And so, by the kindness of the gracious Viceroy, we shall recognise our obligations for your goodness and consideration towards us.'

As he sat down the little company, surrounded by this august assembly, were troubled and straitened in their breast, as men on whom some sore perplexity

had fallen ; and so the Waly desired that they should have time for reflection. Then he gave command for coffee and refreshing sherbets to be handed round. Thereafter they broke up into small parties, each member of the little company being taken separately by two or three of their acquaintance in friendly converse. And as they walked through the halls and reception rooms of the palace, every kind of blandishment was brought to bear upon them. In the end three of the company, yielding to these influences, gave in.

When all, therefore, after this general promenade, had re-assembled in the hall of audience, these three stood up in their midst, and confessed that they had wronged their own souls, and done despite to the Lord and His Prophet in leaving Islam and joining the Christian faith. Then they recited the *Kalimeh*, and acknowledged their belief in God and His Prophet. The assembly accepted their recantation with every expression of favour and delight. The Waly rejoiced, and the Cazee congratulated his Excellency on their return to the true faith, and its forming a ground of hope for the others.

‘For,’ said he, turning to the rest of the little company, ‘our joy will not be perfect so long as any of you remain behind, and baulk our expectation. Come then, and bring back joy and peace to your homes and to the city. Now, in the name of the Lord, stand forth as these your brethren have, and bear testimony to the Lord and to His Prophet, openly and in due form, signifying thus your return to the right way.’

As the Cazee ended Sheikh Mehmud arose.

'I stand before the throne,' he said, 'and in the court of our great Sultan, of whose reign may the Lord advance the power and glory, and give victory over every rebel and enemy thereof. I pray you, our own noble Effendy, to hear me of your grace and clemency a few words as to what is on my heart and the heart of these my companions.'

Waly.—'Say on.'

Mehmud.—'Most noble Effendy and honoured friends! truly you have broken our hearts by the excess of kindness and loving pressure ye have shown—far more than we deserve. Our gratitude overflows towards your Excellency and our friends here present. But it must be manifest to you, my lord Effendy, that faith and conviction are matters of the heart, and go not forth but by evidence and reason. The brotherly influence ye have brought to bear upon us, the warnings, the promises of honour and prosperity have told on certain of us, and led them to forego that of which in their hearts they were firmly convinced. Such recantation can be but outward, not from within. It is not in our power to change conviction, nor in that of men to force it, or to alter our views of the authority of the Gospel, as now in our hands. We cannot, even on your Excellency's command, do violence to our conscience, nor obey otherwise than on clear evidence. But if you, my lord Effendy, and those here present, would graciously condescend to argue the matter with us, and bring proofs to convince us of our errors, it would

well become the nobility and grace of such as you. If we are proved in error, we shall thankfully return to the faith of our fathers. If, in pity for our forlorn estate, ye will agree to this our humble request, well ; or, if ye will, leave us free in the liberty wherewith our gracious Sultan hath blessed all classes of his subjects. The matter lieth in the hands of our lord Effendy, as it may seem right in his eyes.'

During this address the Waly kept frowning angrily, and for some moments there was silence throughout the court. Then he commanded, and the little company were carried outside.

'What think ye,' said the Waly, when they had left, 'of these apostates ? and what shall be their punishment, now that we have failed by friendly treatment ?'

'It is for his Excellency himself,' they answered with one voice, 'with his great knowledge and experience of such difficult cases, to say.'

'Nay,' he replied, 'but ye must advise me.'

Then one said, 'Let two or three of them be put to death as an example to the rest.' Others, 'Let them be confined for a long term, with a heavy fine.' Others again, 'Banish them far away, and confiscate their effects.'

The Cazee sat silent till he was called upon for his opinion.

'I was sitting silent,' he said, 'and thinking ; for it is no light matter to give an opinion in proceedings so grave as these. No doubt your Excellency is well aware that by the law and code of the empire, to every subject is given the right of private judgment, that is to say, freedom to reject whatever faith

or religion he wishes, and equal freedom to embrace whatever faith or religion he may choose. Therefore, to punish these men for abandoning their ancestral creed would not be in accord with the law and constitution of the land. But even so, to set them at liberty at the present time would be inexpedient; for no one knows what might happen in the turmoil and excitement that would ensue. The way out of this difficulty I do not myself at present see, but your Excellency's wisdom and experience for all emergencies will suffice.'

The Waly was startled at the Cazee's explanation of the law, which had escaped him.

'Thou hast spoken what is right,' he said. 'And now, my good Mufty, Êffendy, what sayest thou?'

Mufty.—'The matter standeth as the learned Cazee has put it. I would advise that the accused be detained for a time in some convenient chamber of the court, and their case meanwhile reported to the Sublime Porte for orders. And so, your Excellency and all of us shall be saved responsibility in the matter.'

This was agreed to; and so the little company was sent away to an apartment in the palace, and kept there under surveillance until orders should arrive. Meanwhile their relatives and families, as well as the Cazee and Mufty, and other learned and leading citizens, had permission to visit them at certain times, on condition of doing their best to induce them to abandon their delusions and return to Islam. And a telegram, stating the case, and soliciting orders, was despatched to the Porte.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSPIRACY TO ENTRAP OMAR AL HARIS, WHO IS CONDEMNED AND BEHEADED.

THE little company, led away to their place of confinement in the palace, entered it rejoicing, and saying how good it was to suffer for the truth's sake. But throughout the city, when their imprisonment was noised abroad, the utmost excitement prevailed. Crowds of people, not knowing the cause, came together in amazement, more especially the poor orphans and such as had been the subjects of their benevolence and care. There was nothing but noise and hubbub throughout the streets. In this ferment and turmoil the people were divided, some saying one thing and some another. The upper classes, men of letters, the poets and such-like, cried out against the cruel treatment of men who were patterns of all that was virtuous and good, ornaments of society and pillars of the city. For what misdemeanour could it be? Every kind of imputation was made against the Waly and his council. But amongst the better informed the truth by degrees came out.

The narrative now turns to Sheikh Nasir ud Din and his party. These, joined by many who had a spite against the converts, spread it abroad in every corner of the city that the prisoners had not only

become Christians, but (which few would believe) that they had blasphemed the Prophet and the Coran, seeking thereby to stir up the mob against them. They further sought for means to bring the poor souls within the grasp of the penal law, and for that end assembled in the house of Sheikh Ahmed al Keilany. After long discussion Abd ul Karim summed up thus:—

‘We are all agreed it is expedient that one must be condemned to death ; after which, no doubt, some will recant, and in the end all may come round. We must bear in mind that in this our age it would not be possible to get the government to sentence all, or even several of them, to death, because of the religious freedom prevailing in the great states in alliance with our empire ; and further, because the position of the perverts and their hold upon society is such, that their execution would create uproar and riot, and loss of life in the city. We must not think of that, for we should not succeed ; but against one we might.’

When this had been agreed upon, they fell to discussing which that one should be. Various names were suggested. At last Sheikh Aly Attar spoke.

‘It seems to me,’ he said, ‘that we should single out Omar al Haris. He is young, has no connection to speak of, and is, moreover, disliked for his rough manners and temper. Further, he wants sense to perceive the situation, and so will obstinately persist in his talk, and be easily caught. When he is condemned, the rest will soon recant, the scandal

to Islam will cease, and so we shall have achieved a great gain to the faith.

The project was well received by all, excepting by one, Sheikh Ibrahim, who had till now been silent.

‘By my life!’ he cried, ‘let us hold by the law and by the right, not change piety into perfidy, morning light, as it were, into midnight darkness. I can be no party to compassing the death of a man like this, nor have any share in this wretched work. What harm to us that a neighbour should choose what he believes?’

Sheikh Ahmed bade him angrily not to interfere. ‘We do not ask you to join us; only, if you will leave, keep what you have heard to yourself.’

‘Very good,’ he answered; but as he went his way he cried, ‘The Lord confound your designs against this honest man!’

‘Never mind him,’ said Sheikh Omar; ‘he and his set are always contradicting. Say, honey is sweet. “No,” they say, “it is acid;” or, vinegar is acid, “No, it is sweet.” It was foolish of us to have such a fellow in our company.’

Nasir ud Din.—‘Now that he is gone, let us return to our design, and see how we can best carry it out.’

Sheikh Ahmed.—‘Let us get permission to visit them: then, veiling our object, secure their confidence by friendly converse, especially so with him whom we wish to convict. Upon this, let us put to him these two questions:—“Is the Coran from God?” And again,—“Was Mohammed his messenger?” The poor creature will not know what, in his confusion, to say,

but will answer in his simplicity, without a thought of the consequences. If he agrees, we shall have won him back ; if not, it will be ground for capital punishment.'

'But' said one, 'Omar al Haris is a man of few words, and will be backward to speak before his elders. I doubt if you will get him to talk.'

'Oh,' replied Sheikh Ahmed, 'trust me for that. I will prolong the friendly discussion till all join therein, and he with the rest ; and so, by the help of the Lord, we shall manage it.'

Another said : 'If we all enter together, they will suspect something, and we shall lose our object. Let three be chosen to visit them in their apartment. The rest of us can be about the palace, as if on some business of our own, and thus at hand, waiting the result.'

All assenting, the three chosen were Sheikh Ahmed Keilany, Sheikh Aly Attar and Haj Yasin.

Now it fell out so that the Waly himself, and his courtiers, and certain of the council were also on the look-out for ground whereon to condemn some of the converts, both in order to save the rest, and as a lesson to the people at large, but could find none. The Cazee and Mufty, on the contrary, were both averse from this barbarity, and were specially on their guard against any such machinations. In this they were aided by many of the old friends of the accused, who represented to his Excellency and those around him the danger of such a course.

The little company had been now four days in

confinement when the three conspirators visited the palace. Having obtained permission, on pretence of endeavouring to win them back, they entered their apartment and accosted them with friendly greeting and every mark of sincere regard. For some time the three visitors sat silent, as if in sad reflection, with downcast eyes. You might fancy them lost in an ocean of distress at the fall and misfortune of their friends, while in reality they thirsted for the blood of at least one of their number. At last Sheikh Ahmed opened his mouth, and after expressions of the deepest commiseration, bade them believe that the whole population had been thrown into consternation, small and great. Friends sorrowed, enemies rejoiced. The talk of the city was about nothing else. Some said they had lost their senses, others, that much learning had driven them mad. In every street and lane there was wrangling and contention about them, and so danger to the public peace.

‘Seeing all this,’ he continued, ‘we resolved to visit you and do what we could to make you recant. We adjure you, brethren, by the Lord, to conceal nothing from us that might be of benefit to you, nor refuse to answer our questions. [Omar Zaky, aside to Sheikh Aly.—‘A plot and a subterfuge, this sudden anxiety for our welfare. Be on your guard!'] How glad should we be if ye returned! It would cast a beam of sunshine into your homes, where your poor families sit in bitterness of heart. But if your mind be made up, we should not wish you to change it. Indeed, we should be ready even to go with you, if you could

but show that the path ye have chosen is the right way; for the life to come is ever to be preferred to this present life. Answer us, therefore, the questions we may ask you, with all confidence and friendship, as we, according to our ability, will answer any questions you may put to us. The Lord guide us into the right and blessed way!

Sheikh Mehmud.—‘Ask us then what ye will.’

Sheikh Ahmed.—‘Well, we learn from the rumours afloat, that ye hold the Old Testament and the New to be genuine. And so we are taken aback, knowing that these, as now in the hands of Christians, assert in respect of Jesus, son of Mary (on whom be blessings!), His divinity, crucifixion, death and atonement,—tenets repudiated by the Coran. Is not this to give the lie to the Coran, which all believers hold to be a revelation from the Lord? We await your answer.’

But the company held back from saying a word, suspecting the net that was being spread before them. After a pause Omar Zaky spoke;—

‘We see no reason to answer the question otherwise than that we do believe the Tourât and Gospel to be the uncorrupt word of God, for which, indeed, there are abundant proofs. But be not offended if I say we suspect you of being pretenders come to spy out our liberty—lying in wait, if haply something might escape our lips as ground of complaint against us.’

Sheikh Aly Attar.—‘The Lord forbid! We love you as we love our own brothers. But about this

Bible, we begin to be distressed, thinking that the Coran, containing as it does such contradiction of those tenets, might not be true; or if it be true, then the Book of the Jews and Christians must have been tampered with.'

From this he went on to protest friendship: it was their distress that had brought them to make this visit, and they did not expect such unworthy imputations. It broke their hearts; and so saying, they rose as if to go.

Sheikh Aly (one of the little company) exclaimed in his simplicity: 'Oh, do not go; take not up our brother's words. We recognise your kindly feeling and good neighbourhood. But the question is not exactly as you have put it, whether the Coran is false, implying as it does that all inquiry beyond it were forbidden as a sin. If ye will read the Tourât and the Gospel, you will see, as we have seen, their wonderful agreement. Then compare them with the Coran——' and he was going on with his explanation, when Sheikh Ahmed Keilany interrupted him;—

'We know all that,' he said, 'and it's all good and quite right, and we shall do what you ask hereafter, if the Lord will. But what we are asking now is this:—To assert the genuineness and purity of the Bible, is that not equivalent to a denial of the Coran?'

Aly, startled and taken aback, was silent, suspecting now, with good cause, the purpose and honesty of the speaker. In short, the poor company were in a strait, afraid of committing themselves to what might land them in still greater trouble; like a party of

travellers, glancing on this side and on that, for fear of an ambuscade.

Haj Yasin.—‘Your alarm at finding us in your midst surprises us. [Omar, aside.—‘His assurance in saying that!'] We are your brethren. Have you ever seen or heard anything of us to cause this alarm? Why this change of attitude toward us? Pray tell us.’

Omar al Haris (the poor fellow was simple enough not to see the trap and danger of approaching it).—

Your urgency in pressing the question, for which there appears really no occasion, is what makes us suspect your motives, and puts us on our guard. It would seem plain enough that our leaving Islam is a sufficient answer to the question. Why, then, are ye pressing it? [Now the moment Omar began to speak, the countenances of the visitors brightened, and they took up new ground, so that the arrow should not miss the mark.] No one doubts that the Coran contains many excellent things, taken from the Tourât and Gospel.’

Whereupon Sheikh Ahmed, standing forward and stroking his beard, interrupted him.

‘Well said, my good sir. But hath it been revealed to Mohammed [omitting, as part of the snare, the ordinary invocation of blessing on his name]—that is, revealed to him by inspiration?’

In a low voice Omar, caught in the snare, answered, ‘If I believed that, why then should I have become a Christian?’

At these words the visitors cast off the veil of

hypocrisy, and Ahmed, changing his soft and winning voice, cried out in loud and violent tones,—

‘Then, my friend, you mean to say the Coran is not from God, and Mohammed, the Chosen one, a deceiver, who hath misled mankind with his lies. Mercy on us! God forbid! [Then waxing louder.] Oh, Omar, thou hast blasphemed the Coran and the Prophet in words past all endurance. Allah Akbar! is it come to this? Ah! thou hast done despite to our holy Book, blasphemed the Prophet, and reviled the faith.’

Now, while he was crying out in this excited way, the rest of his party, who with a crowd of ignorant rabble waited outside in expectation of something of the kind, took it for the signal to raise a tumult and storm around the prison house, as indeed had been before concerted. And so, gathering now into a mob, they rushed to the spot, crying out with one accord, ‘Mohammed! Islam! Allah Akbar! Away with the infidels!’ Then at the pitch of their voice: ‘Thou dog! thou swine! Ibn al Haris, blasphemer of the blessed Coran, and of the Prophet, the Elect of God! He calls the Coran a fabrication, and Mohammed an impostor that beguiled the Arabs with his forgeries. O Prophet of the Lord, help! O true believers! for this dog of an apostate hath abused your Prophet, and done despite unto your faith!’ The screaming and shouting had reached a fearful pitch, when the angry crowd made a rush upon the prison door, but were beaten back by the palace guard.

On this, new multitudes, drawn by the tumult, kept running to the spot, both of the common mob, and also

friends of the little company within, and the fighting became fierce. You might have fancied it an attack of Timur Lenk or Bonaparte, and fatal results might have followed, had not a battalion of guards and gendarmes come up, dispersed the riot, and apprehended the ring-leaders. These were at once taken before the Waly, who, presiding in the viceregal court at the moment, and frowning as they entered, upbraided them with raising a tumult at his very gate. Such wild outbursts, he said, brought discredit upon their religion, and could be of no possible advantage to the Prophet or his revelation.

The accused made answer: 'Will our gracious Effendy hear us of his clemency, and after that do as it may please him?'

Permission given, they said that they had visited the palace on business of their own, and, happening to pass the chamber in which the apostates were confined, heard Sheikh Ahmed and his friends talking with them and warning them. "So we said one to another, 'Let us leave these good people alone in their endeavour to bring the renegades back to the faith;' and so passed on to our own affairs. Shortly after, however, some of us passing by, heard Omar al Haris crying aloud that the Coran was not of God, and Mohammed the Coreishite a liar and deceiver. On this, we all crowded back to the door, and such blasphemous words sounded in our ears from the apostate—worse than any Jew or Christian could utter—that our eyes flashed and our hearts burned with righteous indignation, and we could no longer restrain

ourselves. We would give up our lives rather than listen to such abuse of Islam and our Prophet. And so the tumult arose, and we were taken up. We meant no offence to the State, but are the Effendy's humble and obedient subjects, who, admiring your grace and favour, thank your Excellency for patiently listening to our prayers.'

The Waly was satisfied, and ordered them to be seated. Then he called Ahmed and his two companions, and bade them submit a petition in the prescribed form. And this was their petition:—

'YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

'Your servants humbly make complaint and say that, distressed at the apostacy which has occurred, we went with others to the apartment where the perverts are confined, vainly endeavouring to convince them of their error, but met with nothing but rebuff. And when we said, "Doth not the Coran deny the divinity and crucifixion of the son of Mary?" one of them, Omar al Haris by name, said that the Coran had not descended from God. We answered, "But the Prophet of the Lord and His messenger hath said so." "Oh indeed!" said Omar mockingly; "how was he a prophet? a lying Coreishite that deceived the Arabs by his craft and falsehoods." At this our wrath was kindled, and we answered him angrily, as he deserved; which, when those standing without heard, there arose the tumult and outbreak which your Excellency heard. This is our statement of what occurred. We leave the punishment of this calumniator and blasphemer of all

that the true believer holdeth dear, to our Effendy's wisdom.

' AHMED.	ALY.	YASIN.
<i>Keilany.</i>	<i>Attar.</i>	<i>Cabacaby.'</i>

The rioters were on this sent to prison, and the council summoned. Omar al Haris was then called into court, and informed by the presiding judge of the charge of blasphemy set forth in the petition. He denied the charge, and explained exactly how it had all happened, concluding thus:—

'While I was admitting that the Coran contained much that was good, as taken from the Tourât and the Gospel, Sheikh Aly Attar interposed, "Is not the Coran then inspired?" To which I replied, "If I believed that, why then should I have become a Christian?" Whereupon the Sheikh shouted at me with the false charge here set forth; and he and his two companions crying out, raised this tempest—conduct surely unworthy of an accomplished Sheikh like him.'

The Cazee, aside.—'The mischief was that the two ever entered into discourse one with the other at all'

The Judge to Omar.—'Surely the meaning of these words of thine is just such as is complained of, confessing as thou virtually dost that thou hast blasphemed the Coran and the blessed Prophet before many witnesses.'

Omar.—'As to what your Honour says of the meaning of my words, I submit that all peoples, not being Moslems, nor believing in the inspiration of the Coran and the prophetic office of Mohammed, if

they were questioned as I was, could not but answer as I did. And are they to be punished for it? As to the other words imputed to me, I utterly deny them. The Lord knoweth they have been fabricated against me. God forbid I should be guilty of such folly! The complainants are enemies who desire my death; and your Honour knoweth that, with many, a lie supported with false evidence is lawful, if only the object be in the interests of the faith. Now, if sentence is to be passed on the evidence of the mob who stormed the place of our confinement, as to my having blasphemed—such being their very object in waiting there,—will that be just? or is it in accordance with the law that a recent convert like myself should be condemned on the evidence of Mussulmans making such an onset against me, who, moreover, was at that very moment in confinement under the hand of the law? I plead for justice in accordance with law and statute.'

'Silence!' cried the Waly. 'We can show thee no favour but what is in accordance with the law.'

Then he ordered him back again into confinement.

On the morrow, when the council met, the prisoner's case was discussed by them in presence of the Waly. Most gave their vote that he should be beheaded. The Cazee and Mufty objected, the former saying that neither by law nor statute could sentence of death be passed on evidence of Moslems in such circumstances as the present.

President of Council.—'It looks, my honourable friend Effendy, as if you sided with the apostate set. Does your Honour incline to their opinion?'

Cazee, smiling ;—‘That be far from me! But we are sitting in an imperial court, and it behoves us to decide in strict conformity with law and statute.’

So also the Mufty, who said : ‘ In a council such as this, it is of necessity that we put aside all leanings, whether of religion or of race ; for our empire is composed of many nationalities, and peoples professing diverse faiths ; and so, were we to decide apart from the imperial code, on sole considerations of religion, we should be opening the door of oppression, rebellion and disaster. My humble advice is then : if, according to law and constitution, there is ground for the prisoner’s execution, good and well ; otherwise not. But the matter rests with you, most excellent Effendy.’

After reflection his Excellency said : ‘ Let us first see the witnesses, and having heard their evidence, the council will be better able to advise.’

Accordingly he called on the complainants to produce their witnesses ; and having done so, meanwhile beckoned to the Cazee, and when he came, whispered in his ear. ‘ What thinkest thou ? I trust, please God, that the right will be done. We must see that the witnesses are not of the rabble, but respectable and trustworthy men. And now I trust that you will not take any further objection to the proceedings.’

The Cazee replied : ‘ As your Excellency pleases, and returned to his seat.

The complainants brought forward many witnesses, but their evidence was not deemed satisfactory. At the last three were produced, of respectable appearance, mature age and reputed piety. The accused

was summoned. The witnesses, then put on solemn oath, gave circumstantial evidence similar to that of the complainants, and supported the charge in respect of the prisoner's impious utterances. The Waly and his council frowned angrily at the culprit as they listened to the apparent conclusive testimony.

President.—‘What sayest thou to the evidence of these respectable witnesses?’

Omar.—‘My prayer is that their respectability and credit may be multiplied abundantly. Decide what ye will.’

President.—‘Nay, but if thou hast aught in extenuation or defence, say on.’

Omar.—‘Then I make bold to say how amazed and perplexed I am that men of age and standing like these should give such false and trumped-up testimony. Hath speech like this ever been heard from me? The Lord pardon you! How shall ye give answer as to this at the Last Day, the great day of account? To me it is of little moment; for me death is better than living on in this wicked world. But let these conspirators know that my blood will not accomplish that which they desire. My trust is in the Lord; and He is the best of helpers.’

‘Silence! wretch and apostate!’ cried the Waly. ‘Reville not men better and truer than yourself.’

But many in the council said secretly to one another, ‘Nay, for surely he is the truer and the better.’

Omar was then taken back to prison; and after the court had been cleared, the assembly resumed

their deliberation. A number inclined towards the innocence of the prisoner, but their objections were overruled, and the sentence of death agreed to. A telegraphic despatch was then prepared for transmission to the Porte, and the assembly broke up.

As the Cazee and Mufty walked home together the former said,—

‘ My brother, what thinkest thou of the evidence of these men ? ’

Mufty.—‘ It seemed to me shamefully trumped up. I am scandalized at respectable, religious-looking persons like these giving before God such testimony in a case of life and death. Have they no fear of the Lord before their eyes ? ’

And so they conversed as they went along. The Cazee on the way called to mind the story of a sanctimonious witness discovered and discarded by a few close questionings of the Caliph Omar ;—

‘ Just so, ’ he said, ‘ with these creatures who profess much piety, but practise it not, as it is said, “ They think to deceive God, but deceive only their own souls ” (Sura ii. 8). Alas ! that it should have come to what I feared ; but did not I tell you so from the first ? How it went against us signing the warrant of this innocent man ! And who knows but that the rest of the company may be likewise condemned on the evidence of such “ respectable ” witnesses ? Rather than that, I would throw up my office and quit the city. ’

The Mufty, however, set his mind at rest on that point. He had heard reports of the plot to get Omar condemned, with the ostensible object of being a

lesson to the people, and also saving the rest, because he was poor, and had no influential relatives to back his defence. 'It is otherwise with the rest. Sheikhs Aly and Mehmud have many powerful friends, and I myself will oppose any evil overtaking them, to the utmost of my ability. So, I think, my friend, thou need'st not be under any apprehension as to their safety.'

Cazee.—'Thank God, my brother! The Lord reward thee! Thou hast lightened my heart and calmed my anxiety.'

And so separating, they went each to his own house.

We now turn to the little company in confinement. The uproar that followed upon the conspiracy filled them with alarm, all excepting Sheikh Aly, who maintained composure throughout the storm. But when they heard of the fatal sentence, they all broke down and wept bitterly; for Omar was young, under thirty years of age, father of two little boys, handsome and engaging in carriage, winning in speech, wise and able in conduct, far removed from all that was false and frivolous, and so was beloved by all around him. When he returned to his friends after the trial and sentence, he sat down in their midst leaning his elbows on his knees, his eyes on the ground, and silent for a time; while none of the company, immersed as they were in grief, could say a word. At last, looking up through his tears,—

'The time,' he said, 'is come when I must leave you, beloved friends, and seal my testimony with my blood; and if it be the Lord's will that I should die, then death to me is sweet, because in the way that

He directeth. But I am weak and sorrowful ; and one of my sorrows and anxieties is lest, when ye see your brother mantled with blood for holding fast the gospel, ye become faint at heart and waver. But, please God, it may be the reverse of that, and strengthen you in the truth. My poor wife and two dear boys I leave in my Heavenly Father's hand. I hear that she has gone with them to her father's house. I trust I may see them once again before I die. And I pray my honoured friends Sheikh Aly and Sheikh Mehmud, that they would cast an eye of pity on the orphan children of their brother, who would now confer upon them the parent's charge to bring them up in the Lord—for that weighs upon me—if it please Him again to free your path and give you standing in the city. As for me, I shall be put to death, as I think, on the morrow. But let not that grieve you over much ; for I die not because of any offence, but for the truth's sake, and the sake of Him who died for me. This is my crown of rejoicing before the Lord. It is all they can do—kill the body, but cannot touch the soul. This separation is but for a moment, and there will be a joyful reunion before our blessed Redeemer. The Lord is my refuge, and to Him I fly as my hiding-place.'

Then the rest began to speak comfortably to him, one after another.

Sheikh Aly.—' Would that the arrow had been shot at me, and that thou hadst escaped ! How evil the craft of mankind ! If they put to death the blessed Son of Mary, who came to bless them, is it a great

thing if they put to death His followers? Thank God, who hath stablished thy faith and strengthened thine heart.' With many such words did he comfort Omar, and now he ended, 'May the Father of mercy and God of all grace bless thy two sons, of whom, if it please God, we shall take the charge, as if they were our own.'

Mehmud followed in the same strain, with a cry of anguish,—

'Ah! the young taken, and the old left. Might it please the Lord yet to save him!'

And so they spent great part of the night in sorrowful discourse and prayer.

The same evening a despatch came by telegraph from the Porte. It expressed the Sultan's grief and concern at the apostacy of the eight perverts, as reported in the first telegram, and at the charge of blasphemy against one of them in the second. 'Now,' it proceeded, 'if the accused be proved, on the testimony of trustworthy witnesses, to have spoken despitefully of the Coran and the Prophet, we ordain that he be executed by the sword on the day after receipt of this command, in presence of the officers of state, of the troops, and of the perverts themselves, for a warning to them. As regards these, however, so long as there is no offence against the law, change of religion does not of itself subject the pervert to punishment. But if there be reasonable apprehension that their presence may cause tumult and disturbance in the city, then they must be removed to some other land for a period; but during their absence the effects,

dwellings and families pertaining to them must be protected.'

On the receipt of this imperial firman the officers of state, the general commanding the troops, the heads of the city, and other leading men were summoned by the police. When all were assembled before the Waly the order was read aloud to them, on hearing which they shouted, as with one voice, 'Long live our Sultan, Commander of the Faithful, and you, his Viceroy, our governor!' The Waly then said that the execution must be, as commanded, on the morrow. Some proposed an early hour; but the Cazeer suggested after midday, at the second hour of the day, so that the condemned man might have time for reflection, and for seeing his family and friends, who might haply recall him to the faith. After some consultation with the Mufty, this was agreed to, and also that the rest of the company should be exiled on the 14th day of the month,—the date, however, for the present, to be held private. The dragoman then made proclamation accordingly, whereupon all praised the condescension of his Excellency, and every man returned to his home.

In the morning the prisoner was formally notified of the sentence and time of execution. On this being noised abroad, his family and friends set up a wild lamentation. His wife, taking her two little sons, one five, the other seven years of age, hastened along the road to the palace, followed by her mother, brother, and husband's sister, her garments rent, and her hair dishevelled, weeping as she went. Entering, she fell

senseless at Omar's feet. Then, beating her face, and dwelling on his love for her, and hers for him, she besought Omar to have pity on her and her orphaned children.

'Alas and alas!' she cried, 'think on these tender ones and on your handmaid, all bereft of their protector. Oh, as you love me, change your mind, or keep it all within your own heart, until the Lord shall open a way of safety!'

And again she fell at his feet, bathing them with her tears, and the children crying bitterly. Omar raised her gently, and calling her the dearest object to him in the world, bade her quiet her distress and listen to what he had to say. So she sat by him, as he wiped the tears from his boys' eyes, clasped them both to his breast, and kissed them tenderly. Then, with difficulty restraining himself from an outburst of grief, he began to speak to his wife. In a long and loving address, interrupted over and again by fits of emotion, he dwelt on the transitoriness of time here, and the reunion beyond. Separation from her, the flower of his life, his very heart's blood, was grievous; but to deny his Saviour would be still more grievous, make him miserable here, and lost hereafter. Should he outwardly recant, keeping faith in his heart, as she had suggested, out of love for her and the children, that would be hateful hypocrisy toward God, and the selling of his Saviour. He could not go back, as he had often told her;

'If thou truly lovest me,' he continued, 'stay thine importunity, and let me go to my Lord; then, if thou

wilt join me in the path of life, we shall soon meet again above.' And so he exhorted her, and the relatives that accompanied her, to embrace the faith of Jesus, repeating John iii. 16, and other passages on the love of God and eternal life. After that he commended his sons to the guardianship of Aly and Mehmud, and clasping them to his bosom, prayed: 'O Fountain of mercy, and grace, and consolation, bless you, my beloved sons, and guide you both, as your father hath been guided, into the right way! Man may separate us now, but they shall not be able in His heavenly kingdom.'

His sister, who had been standing by weeping, now fell on his neck.

'My soul!' she cried, 'how can I live without my brother, the light of my eyes? My only brother, dear! I would not add to your grief; but whither shall I go, and what is life without thee? Would that my mother had never borne me, or that I had died before thee. And to see thy blood shed! Oh that my eyes were darkened to hide away the sight! Oh that the Lord might yet stay this calamity!' And she threw herself on him, kissing his hands and neck and feet, with a bitter cry.

He wept too, and kissed her; then quieted her with loving words, and begged that she should take his wife away.

'Never!' she said;—'I will cling to thy side so long as I may see thy face. Knowest thou not that every moment by thee is dearer to me than all my life?'

Just as this scene, which might have melted a heart

of stone, was going on, the Cazee and Mufty came up to see if they could not make Omar recant ; but he refused. Then the Cazee took him into an adjoining apartment by himself alone, and did his utmost to persuade him to return to Islam outwardly, when he promised him a pardon, and that he would get him sent away to Europe, or to the Lebanon, where he might in safety profess the Christian faith ; and he gave him the Waly's solemn guarantee to that effect.

Omar thanked him kindly for the interest he had shown in him, both at court and now. 'But God forbid,' he said, 'that I should forsake the gospel, even for a time or in appearance, or say with my tongue that which is opposed to my heart's conviction. But I well know that it is nothing but affection that has led you to make me this offer.'

Then grasping his hand, with the prayer that every blessing might attend him, he kissed it, while the Cazee kissed his in affectionate return. After that the Cazee took his way homeward with the Mufty, both deeply affected at the devotion and steadfastness of the youthful confessor.

Great numbers of friends and relatives kept crowding the room, in the vain hope of making him change his mind. And so things went on till the hour arrived, and his brethren and family fell on his neck with a last farewell. His wife and sister, since his return from the interview with the Cazee, had not ceased clinging to him in their uncontrollable grief, when the commandant of the guard entered, and, having hung across Omar's breast the fatal decree,

led him forth from the place of confinement with his family and friends, and the little company of converts, and just then the General appeared with a squadron of horse. The procession was at once formed; a column of gendarmes marched in front, and a body of the imperial troops in the rear; the prisoner and his friends, surrounded by the officers of state and other grandees, in the centre. There followed a crowd of citizens, and a great multitude of the common people. Most of the latter were pleased at the sight, but of the more intelligent classes many were distressed and sorrowful. And so they moved slowly on till they reached the place of execution. There the squadron, with its glittering arms, was drawn up on one hand, and the gendarmes on the other, with the crowd on a rising ground behind. The Mufty now came forward, and separating from Omar his wife and sister, who had till now been holding his hands on either side, carried them to a suitable spot adjoining. Then, having obtained permission, Omar spoke as follows:—

He rejoiced it was not for any crime he was about to suffer. Before Heaven he affirmed that the evidence against him was false, and might the Lord forgive them that gave it. He had done no wrong, but was nevertheless ready to die for the gospel's sake; and in presence of that great assembly, the rich, the learned, and multitude of fellow-citizens, he confessed that he had embraced the blessed faith of the Messiah; and he testified that Jesus, Son of Mary, the wonderful 'Word' and 'Spirit of God,' had come to

save them from a death far more fearful than the present he was about to suffer ; and he ended thus : ' Jesus came to give, through His death, eternal life to as many as believe on Him. Look on me, my fellow-citizens, how I rejoice in this faith with the sword unsheathed above me. Thanks be to God for letting me tell you this ! And now, if I have wronged any one, I crave his pardon. The hour hastens on when we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Him who shall render to every man according to his deeds.'

Having spoken this in a loud voice, before the whole assembly, he knelt down and prayed for a blessing on his home and people, on the Sultan and all rulers and governors, and on those who had sought his life, ending thus : ' O Lord Jesus, the Messiah, into Thy hands I commend my spirit !' He ceased, and as he continued kneeling in perfect peace, with quiet and downcast look, his noble countenance lightened with tranquillity, all stood overawed at the sight, an impression that never was effaced.

At the fatal trumpet signal the sword flashed upon his neck and the head rolled from the body which fell all gory to the ground. His relatives pressed forwards to the spot, weeping bitterly ; his sister caught up the head and pressed it to her bosom, while the poor widow fell upon the corpse, wailing loudly. The remains were then placed upon a bier, covered over with a pall of crimson velvet, and, by order of the authorities, borne to the Christian burial-ground, where, with all reverence and regard, they were committed to the dust.

CHAPTER IX.

RESULTS FOLLOWING THE EXECUTION—RIOT IN CITY—FRIENDS VISIT THE CONVERTS.

THE courageous attitude of Omar, his address and prayer, had a wonderful effect on the people at large, who said that there must be something good in that which made the martyr smile under the unsheathed sword. There was a revulsion of feeling, and the conduct of those who planned the plot and gave false witness was freely canvassed all over the city. The most remarkable result, however, was the conversion of a man of rank, Ahmed Effendy al Cotely, who, after the trial, went and bought a Bible and some Christian books; and finding that the Coran itself gave testimony to the Gospel, spent much of his time in its study. Guided thus to the Divine light by the example and steadfastness of the martyr, he at last embraced the Christian faith.

Let us now return to the three converts who, under the blandishments of the Waly's council, had gone back from their profession. The scene just enacted at the execution struck deep into their hearts. They were self-accused at having disowned their convictions, and repented of what they had done. Syed Mustaffa was miserable, as indeed the other two also.

'Alas!' he said, 'why did I deny my Saviour, and

prefer the present life to that which shall not end? My head, as saith Jeremiah, is a fountain of water, from which tears run down night and day.'

Hasan Effendy joined in the same bitter lament; but he could not at the present moment face the anger of the people and wrath of the government, with the fate of Omar before him. He would wait, haply but for a short time, and when things mended would then make profession of the faith; but he could not do it now.

Syed Hasan, the third, said the same; but Syed Mustaffa replied: 'Shall we follow our Saviour in seasons of peace and safety, and not also in times of difficulty? How can I do violence to my conscience? And if I return, He that forgave Peter will also forgive me.' With many such words he declared his resolve to renounce his recantation. 'If it does come to the death, we shall be safe with our Saviour; if spared, we can join ourselves to the rest of the converts.'

The other two, amazed at his boldness, said that they must put off their decision to a more convenient season, and with these words departed.

Mustaffa, grieved at their defection, next morning presented himself before the Waly in court. Asked by the Mufty the reason, he said that ever since, ten days before, he had renounced the Christian faith, he had been in a vortex of misery at having denied his Saviour, and now came to withdraw his recantation. The council were astonished at his intrepidity, and the Waly cried, frowning severely,—

'So thou liedest before the court of thy sovereign,

thou hypocrite ! thou swine ! What now shall be thy punishment ?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'or rather, before my God and King, I lied. If I deserve it I am not afraid to die.'

While the Waly thus stormed at him, he remained unmoved as a rock amid the waves. They now saw the error they had committed in putting Omar to death, and the fruits it was bearing. After consultation he was remanded to prison with the others. It was a joy and revival to these to be rejoined by their lost companion, who told them of what the Waly had said, and of the refusal of the other two to obey their convictions. They conversed gladly on the kindness of God to them, and kneeling down, offered up thanks.

After Mustaffa left the court the Waly gave way to astonishment at the constancy of the man, and the result so contrary to all they had counted on as the effect of the execution. But the Cazee said he had never approved the sentence of death, fearing just such an outcome as this ; and he was lost in admiration of the great strength and firmness of the confessor, the fierce and angry look of the Waly notwithstanding. Then one arose and said,—

'This was nothing more than the work of the accursed Satan, who got hold of vain and conceited souls, making them believe right wrong, and wrong right. Set them down, and make them labour ; that would be more effectual than any load of threats and penalties.'

'True,' answered another. 'If these were low and conceited fellows, instead of some of our best and

wisest citizens ; but how such Satanic delusions could have entered their minds, I cannot conceive.'

The Mufty submitted that the case which had just come up was not singular. The popular feeling had turned much that way. Omar, they said, was unjustly executed ; the evidence false and got up. Such errors should be refuted by argument, not by the sword. To use the sword in suppression of false beliefs was behind the age ; and other such things he had overheard, that he need not repeat.

'What is all this thou art talking about ?' cried the Waly. 'It is altogether out of order.'

'Nay !' replied the Mufty ; 'by my life it is but the truth.'

The Waly was much excited, and sat silent for a while, the marks of anger mantling in his face. Then, quieting down, he said,—

'No more of this objectionable speech. We must act according to the law and custom of the land.'

So they held their peace and kept to their coercive measures.

Now Nasir ud Din and his friends were vexed exceedingly, and angry at finding their machinations against the converts not succeed as they expected, but that, on the contrary, Syed Mustaffa had gone back to them. So in their spite they set about stirring up the city, and spread themselves over the bazaars and streets, crying out that the perverts still indulged in abusive language against Islam ; and, Omar's execution notwithstanding, persisted in the their petulant ways.

Chief among these was the half-witted Haj Cadur, already noticed, who went about the lanes, bazaars and coffee-shops in his strange attire, stretching aloft his hands after his wild and crazy fashion, to attract attention, capering on his toes, and with every preposterous gait and action, screaming, with crowds around him, against the converts. The populace enjoyed the sight, but most of the better class were scandalized, and tried without avail to stop the crazy creature, who went about shouting in this fashion :— ‘ Al hamd ul lilahi. Praise the Lord. The idolater’s head cut off for abuse of the Coran, and his soul gone to hell. Why have not the rest of them been sent there too, and we well rid of them ? ’

Several times he had been stopped by the authorities, but he soon began again. One day, when behaving in this wild way, swaying to and fro as a drunken man, and screaming like a madman, he passed by the shop of Haj Ibrahim, a wise and pious Egyptian merchant, who had often before tried to stop him, and now called kindly to him to come near. Refusing to be reasoned with, the Haj got wilder and wilder, and like one possessed, poured forth his incoherent effusions against the perverts, and eventually on the good Egyptian himself. At last a neighbour, interposing, asked the Egyptian what was the use of checking the fool who was always getting up such scenes, and had been imprisoned and fined over and over for it? And so the good man, thanking him, gave up the attempt.¹

¹ There are two or three pages of the madman’s effusions, which I have not thought worth while to give. They are in-

Now the families and connexions of the converts were alarmed at the treacherous attacks of the hostile party, and their attempts to excite the people against them, and strove in every way to avert the blow thus aimed at their safety, and free them from the risks that beset their path. Thus they got the ear of the Cazee and Mufty, and of the ladies of their households, and of many others, who like them were pitiful and compassionate. The better part of the city was of this mind, sympathising with the sufferers; while the party of Nasir ud Din, with the baser sort, and Haj Cadur at their head, kept up their machinations.

One day, as the Haj was holding forth in this wild way at one of the cafés of the town, Sheikh Hasan, Aly's brother, chanced to pass by, and Aly's name caught his ear in connection with contemptuous and abusive words. Peeping through the lattice of the shop, he saw the fool in his antics, surrounded by a company of like-minded simpletons, screaming against the Christians, and capering like a wanton camel.

Now Hasan was a tall, handsome young fellow strong and powerful, amongst the first athletes of the city, of high breeding and gentle bearing, of few words, but affable withal. He restrained himself as long as he could, till at last, smarting under the abuse of his brother and the other converts, he could bear it no longer, and standing before the door, called the

tended to illustrate the kind of enemies a convert is likely to meet with in an Oriental city, as bearing on the outbreak that follows.

maniac to account for seeking to drag his brother to the same fate as Omar's.

'By the Lord!' he cried; 'not a drop of his blood shall be shed, but for every drop fifty dogs like unto thee shall die the death. If Sheikh Aly become a Christian, or even a Kafir, what is that to thee, craven wretch?'

The fool returned the threats in blustering language, calling Hasan a recreant, apostate, and idolater.

At these words Hasan darted like an eagle on Haj Cadur, threw him on the ground, and kept tossing him like a ball about with his feet, while the wretched creature screamed, —

'O followers of Mohammed, he is killing me! O Moslem brothers, this accursed Christian!'

The rabble and scum from all around flocked to the spot, and a scene of riot and uproar ensued; but the friends of Hasan, who was very popular with the better classes, and despised the capering fool, soon came to the rescue, on which the mob turned and fled, all except Haj Cadur, who was so bruised with the kicking that he could not run away with the rest; so, stopping his screams, he slipped into the corner of a mosque, and lay for shelter there. But he had hardly rested any time, when the crowd rushed back again in still greater force—all the dregs of the city, young and old. The riot became worse than ever, and if a company of dragoons had not arrived on the spot, the consequences would have been serious.

The Haj and Hasan, with a score of those who began the disturbance, were had up before the magis-

trates, who sentenced the two, as ringleaders, to a year's imprisonment, with the fine of fifty liras, and the others to two months and twenty liras fine. After ten days, however, they were let out on the security of respectable citizens, and payment of fine—a little matter for Hasan, but serious for Cadur, who had to borrow the money. On release, they were had up before the Waly, who warned Cadur that if he abused the party in prison again, or maligned the Christian religion, he would be severely punished.

The Haj cried out in reply that he had done nothing to be attacked by Hasan in that way, and now to be punished so, and fined, a poor man like him, in so heavy a sum!

'It is your own folly and ill-mannered ways,' answered his Excellency, 'that have brought this upon you. Begone! mind your own business; and interfere not again in matters you have no concern with.'

Hasan then made a feast to the four friends who were taken up with him, paid their fines, and sent them away with handsome gifts, rejoicing. But as for the fool, he still talked foolishly, went about complaining that he had been punished because he spoke the truth of the perverts, and crying out, 'Alas! alas for our religion!' After going on for some time in this way, to the annoyance of the whole city, he fell sick and died.

Now the Waly was much disconcerted and troubled by these outbreaks, and fearing their recurrence, summoned an assembly of the leading men of the city in the hall of audience; and as they were seated

on his right hand and his left, he called on his private secretary to address them. So the private secretary arose. He recounted the circumstances from the beginning—the arrest of the perverts, the communications with the Porte, the execution of Omar, and the order to expatriate the remainder for the tranquillity of the city. It was the Waly's earnest desire that all should cordially unite in giving effect to these arrangements, in which event they should have his favour as good citizens; but if there were any opposition or disturbance, the severest measures would be taken. It was his Excellency's wish, as a father, to promote the happiness of his children; but if there were any more rioting or risings, they would have cause to repent.

The chief Bey of the city made a courtly answer, thanking the Waly for his kind hand over them, and promising obedience. His Excellency had indeed treated them as an indulgent father would. There should be no more disturbance. They agreed in the wisdom of sending away the Christian converts, to prevent recurrence of excitement in the city, and hoped they might yet come back to their ancestral faith, bringing joy and satisfaction with them.

The Waly expressed his pleasure, and then commanded the edict for exile to be prepared. Coffee and refreshments were served, and the assembly broke up.

We return to the converts in confinement. When they heard of the outbreak they were much disturbed, not knowing what the consequences might be. Aly, especially, was greatly distressed, till, after a day or

two, they heard the result. So when Hasan, now set at liberty, visited the prison chamber, his brother chided him for giving way to his anger ;—

‘Let the half-witted Haj and his fellows say what they like, and fabricate what lies they will. The Lord seeth them, and the Lord sufficeth us for a Helper.’

The others also all enjoined self-restraint and patience on their friends.

Now, from the time of their final imprisonment, and especially since Omar’s execution, not only the Cazee and Mufty, but great numbers of the chief citizens, as well as their immediate friends and relatives, crowded to their chamber with earnest entreaties that for the sake especially of their families they would return, at the least in outward appearance, to the faith, and thus not be forced to leave the homes that were so dependent on them. These appeals were the sorest trial they had to bear. And, in truth, no one who has not himself gone through it all can tell the bitterness thereof.¹ So that, wearied and distressed, they longed for the day when they should be taken away from the city. And thus they talked one with another.

Ibrahim.—‘One’s own tears comfort the heart ; but the tears of one’s household do break it.’

Soleiman added : ‘A mother’s tears bind us as with a cord to the home below ; grace in the heart as a cord to the home above.’

¹ The expressions here would seem to signify that the writer had, as we have seen, gone through it all himself ; and, though under different circumstances, had the same experience.

Mehmud.—‘ Yes, her tears are sore to bear: he that can stand against them is proof even against the sword.’

Aly spoke of the love of our Saviour for us on the cross, as an example to His followers to bear up against the bitterness of separation from one’s home.

Then Abd ul Halîm quaintly added: ‘ The tears of parents avail not to bring back children taken away by death; how then shall they avail to bring back children who, like us, have died in Christ?’

With such loving words did they pass the time, and comfort one another.

Now, after the edict of exile, the Cazee and Mufty visited the city prefect, the treasurer, the Imam of the Great Mosque, and certain of the nawabs, and resolved with them on a last attempt to gain the perverts’ return. So, after asking the blessing of the Lord on their attempt, they waited on the little company in prison, and courteously saluted them.

Then the Cazee arose and made a touching appeal. The edict of expatriation had melted the hearts of all their friends. With much emotion he made mention of the inmates of their harems, and besought them not to harden their hearts to all these miseries. They came with the endeavour of recalling them to the faith of their fathers, and still had hopes that they would turn their weeping into laughter and joy.

The little company were greatly moved, especially Sheikh Mehmud, who had a very tender heart. The visitors all addressed the converts in the same strain and then Sheikh Aly made reply;—

He begged to be heard graciously, even as they would that the Lord should hear them. In terms of overflowing gratitude he thanked them for their goodness and concern. Referring to the epistle which had led them to inquire into the validity of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, he challenged discussion and entered into the arguments which had induced them to accept the Gospels and the Christian faith. Conviction like this could not be put aside. If we are proved wrong, we are ready to come back; but exile from city, home and all our dear ones, is more tolerable to us than would be a return to Islam against our peace of conscience. Though we must hold to our decision, we are not the less sensible of your kindness, which we can never forget. It is the Lord's help we look for in these our perplexities and sorrows—the Great, the Merciful, He that sufficeth for us, and He is the best of defenders.¹

To all this the Mufty replied very briefly. They were distressed that their effort had proved fruitless. They came with no intention of entering into a discussion; for the company of converts were as learned as themselves on all these points—probably more so; and they felt it would be of no use. Grieved at heart he ended: 'We can but leave you in the hands of One who is able to deliver you from the paths of error, and plant your feet in the way of truth and peace.'

¹ This is given with a great deal of repetition of what has gone before, but which will not, on that account, be unwelcome to the Oriental reader.

And so the visitors left.

As the Cazee wended his way homeward, he was much exercised in mind about all this. The brave attitude of the company, the powerful address of Aly, and the appeal to bring the matter to the test of argument. 'What arguments have I,' he would keep saying to himself, 'of equal strength? Can I shut my eyes to the appeal? Is it not a reasonable demand?'

The poor prisoners had become so distressed by continual visits of their well-meaning friends, that they longed for a place of quiet and peace. Yet they were much encouraged by the interview just described. 'Was it fear,' said one, 'of not being able, that held them back from controverting our arguments;—fear of disgrace, and love of the world?'

'Or,' said another, 'because they saw us so well prepared?'

And the effect was to give the little company confidence and assurance in the truths they held.

CHAPTER X.

CONFERENCE WITH CAZEE AND MUFTY ON THE CLAIMS OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE day following the Cazee and his friends met again, and, talking the matter over, Hasan the prefect said he had been thinking they were bound to answer the challenge to discuss the claims of the Gospel ; otherwise it would be taken as admission of weakness. 'How can we, heads of the Moslem faith, continue to boast the unassailable strength of our religion, if we decline the gauntlet thus cast down before us ; or blame them otherwise for acting as they have ? We are surely bound to answer the appeal, and so deliver our own souls.' All agreeing, they fixed the night of the 4th Safar for the purpose. The little company rejoiced greatly on being told of this, though some feared it might be a plot, as before, to entangle them. So they prepared for the conference with fasting and prayer.

Accordingly, on the night appointed, their friends invited them to a room prepared for their reception, where they were received with a kindly salutation. The Cazee said they had thought it right to respond to their challenge ; there would be perfect freedom of speech, and no unfair advantage would be taken of

unwary slips or faults on either side. 'And now it is for you, my friends, to open the argument in any way ye will.'

Sheikh Aly, after thanking the visitors for the promised freedom of speech, said: 'I understand that ye ask of us our reason for leaving the Moslem faith?'

Cazee.—'Just so: let us choose a speaker for each side; the rest to be silent, unless aid is called in.'

The Cazee and Aly being chosen, the former thus opened the debate:—

'We will not go back upon the arguments we have heard before. I wish simply to ask you this: Is it not conceivable that the Almighty should devise the salvation of man, otherwise than by sending His Son (supposing there be a Son) to be incarnate, to live our life and be put to death at the hands of wicked men?'

Aly.—'Everything is possible with God, that is not inconsistent with His perfections and attributes.'

Cazee.—'Yes; but explain your meaning.'

Aly.—'I mean that He is just as well as almighty, and that His power must be exercised in a way not opposed to right.'

Cazee.—'But can this be asked of God? When He commandeth a thing, who can say unto Him, "What doest Thou?"'

Aly.—'How then can God be just, and yet forgive the sinner?'

Cazee.—'Why need I to know that? God acts in accordance with His perfections, and is absolute.'

Aly.—'Yes; but it is needful that man know the goodness and love of God, and so praise Him for the

same ; and also that he may know how to approach his Maker in the way, and by the door provided for him ; otherwise, why a Book and a Revelation at all ?'

This argument is carried on at a rather wearisome length ; the Cazez contending that after the punishment is undergone, the creature enters Paradise ; while Aly holds that sin cannot be thus treated. If a man is liberated after undergoing the full term where is the mercy ? And how, if the sin be against the Infinite, and require a corresponding penalty, can the justice of God in pardoning be reconciled with His mercy ?'

The Cazez, blushing.—' I know not, excepting that " He pardoneth whom He will, and destroyeth whom He will."'¹

Aly.—' But the Bible shows how God's justice in pardoning is compatible with His mercy ;' and at the Cazez's request he explains the plan of salvation, both from the Old Testament and the New. Isaiah liii. is quoted, which the Cazez admits to be in point, if it has not been foisted. Sacrifice, as laid down in the law, is dealt with at some length, as pointing to the death and atonement of Christ. The argument then passes on to the Trinity.

¹ Sura v. 21. In illustration of the above argument, Aly asks whether slander against the Sultan, and slander against the Prophet, would be held equal offences ? ' No,' replied the Cazez ; ' one would be punished slightly, the other with death.' Aly.—' Then here the sin is against the Infinite, and the penalty must consequently be endless.' This part is not so powerful or satisfactory as the rest of the work, and has been much abridged in the present version.

Cazee.—‘The Lord our God is one Lord: how then do the Christians talk of the Father and the Son? God forbid! it is all against reason.’

Aly.—‘But stay,—can any but God Himself know His own nature?’

Cazee.—‘None.’

Aly.—‘Then we need a revelation of the same from Himself;’ and he proceeds to show that there is nothing in the doctrine, as taught by Christians, against reason.

In illustration he brings the sun as a trinity of body, heat, and light; and so of man, with body and soul. We can only accept what the Almighty has been pleased to reveal of Himself in the Bible, and as embodied there in the form of words at baptism, enjoined by Jesus Christ Himself on His disciples.

The Mufty then enters the lists. He quotes Sura cxii:—“Say; He is God, the One, the Eternal, He begetteth not, neither is begotten, nor is there any one like unto Him.” ‘How now, can a Son be said to be born to God, implying time, whereas God is eternal; and the Son, too, said to be God of very God? Impossible to believe that this is the Word of God! it must have been foisted into it.’

Aly.—‘Well, the idea of foisting is all in favour of its not being opposed to reason, else why introduced by human hand? But that is out of the question. The doctrine of the Trinity runs through the Bible, which begins with, “Let US make man”; and the Christ is spoken of in Isa. ix. 6, 7 as “the Everlasting Father,” etc. All this in the Old Testament, not a

Christian book, but in the hands of Jews, who reject the doctrine. The Gospel, again, is but the fulfilment of the Old, which signifies the death of Christ for the redemption of mankind. That the Son was begotten of the Father, was before all time, we cannot tell *how*. Perhaps it might illustrate it to say that *heat* is begotten of the sun, both having had an origin at one and the same time. All this has been revealed to us out of the Father's love, in terms adapted to our finite understandings. And it is all in accordance with the Coran.'

Mufty.—'In the Coran! this teaching?'

Aly.—'Yes; it is so.'

Mufty.—'Good! Show it to us, if thou canst.'

Aly turned up Sura Imran iii. v. 43: "When the angels said to Mary, Verily God sendeth good tidings of THE WORD (proceeding) from Himself: His name the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary; honourable in this world and in that to come; and one of those that draw near (unto the Throne);"—all this plainly signifying that THE WORD was a person, the possessor of this dignity. Further, the expression, "THE WORD from Him," is evident proof that the person born of Mary, namely, the Messiah, is of the nature of God; and this Name and Nature are just what we find written in the Gospel:—"In the beginning was THE WORD, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; and again: "And THE WORD was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John i. 1, 14). And yet again: "And He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called THE WORD of

God" (Rev. xix. 13); the meaning being that the Word, an attribute of Jesus, born of Mary, is from eternity of the Godhead; and the words "with God," and "was God" signifying the distinct personality of the Word, as well as being very God.' [He then notices a remarkable fact, that though 'the Word' (Kalimat) is grammatically feminine, yet it is construed as masculine in the above passage. Thus agreeing with the Gospel.]

Here Abd ul Hamid, with the Mufty's permission interposed. 'No one,' he said, 'can interpret the Coran, but the Lord alone, and our great authorities. In so serious a matter it would be rash to trust our own judgment. Let us go to such commentators as Beidhawy and Razy. Now Beidhawy's interpretation is this: "Verily the likeness of Jesus is as the likeness of Adam. He created Him out of the dust; then said to Him, BE, and He was" (Sura iii. 58) that is, He became man, not God, as the Christians think. Then again, in Sura *Maida*:—"And when God shall say: O Jesus, son of Mary, hast Thou said unto men, Take Me and My mother for two Gods besides God? He shall say: God forbid! It is not for Me to say that which I ought not"' (v. 125).

Aly objected that every man must judge for himself what the meaning of such texts was; for, just as one writing a letter would put in it what his friend would understand, so with the message in the revelation of the Almighty. No doubt there were obscure passages in the Coran, that needed the help of commentators. But those respecting Jesus, son

of Mary, were plain and simple. 'If I speak to a child of "milk from the goat," or "dates from the tree," does it require a learned doctor with his laws of grammar to make the child understand? No, by my life! And so with the passages which tell us that Jesus was born without an earthly father;—"the Word from God," and "His Spirit." Any man of sound and unprejudiced mind would understand that. But people recite the Coran by rote, without thinking of its meaning. I make bold to say that I myself have made some proficiency in these studies, and have the commentaries of both the Imams you have referred to; but after all, these do not help you and me in the same way as our own sense and intellect. I admit that there are passages in the Coran which deny the divinity of the Messiah; but these do not affect our right to stand upon those other grand verses in the Coran that are in accord with the Old Testament and the New in this matter.'

Abd ul Hamid interposed with the objection that 'the pronoun *min* (from) in the phrase "Word from Him," does not imply that the Word was a part of, or an emanation from, the Deity; but simply "from."

Aly.—'Had the meaning been as you suppose, then in the announcement of the birth of Jesus, would not the ordinary form of speech have been used, as in the case of Abraham's guests, who addressed him thus: "We bring thee tidings of a wise son" (Sura xv. 52); or of Zacharias: "The angels called to him as he stood praying in the chamber, Verily, God sendeth thee good tidings of (a son named) John,

who shall bear witness to THE WORD (proceeding) from God, honourable, chaste, and one of the righteous prophets" (Sura iii. v. 39)? How different the tidings conveyed to Mary regarding one who was Himself of the Divine nature: "O Mary, verily God giveth good tidings to thee of THE WORD from Him;" not of a wise son, nor yet of a righteous prophet, as in the case of Zacharias and Abraham. How different also is the passage in Sura iv. v. 169. "Verily Jesus, son of Mary, is the Apostle of God, and HIS WORD, which He conveyed unto Mary, and a SPIRIT proceeding from Him." What other prophet, I ask, is given such a descent? The verse is not content with the attribute of prophetic rank, but adds "the Word of God"; and, lest we should understand this in any other way than was intended, there is added, as it were in explanation, "and a Spirit from Him"; to show that Jesus was not as other prophets, but as a Son sent by His Father into the world. Are not these verses in entire conformity with the Gospel? Then, what stress is laid on His birth, different from that of all other men, without an earthly father; and the heavenly relation to the Deity, different also from that of all other prophets and messengers. Is it not then with right that He is called "the Son of God," as we find it in the Gospel?'

'And now, let me tell you the story of a Christian with whom, some four years ago, I was arguing, and was talking, according to our wont, of Mohammed as above all other prophets—"the chiefest of the sons of Adam," the Imam Ghazaly calls him. As I was

saying this I saw him smile ; and I said, "Why dost thou smile?"

"Oh, it was nothing," he answered.

"Nay, but thou didst smile ; and, by the Lord ! I must know the reason why."

"Well," he said, "a certain thing caused me to smile ; but why should I tell it, unless there were some necessity?"

'Getting impatient I said, "Tell it me at once, thou Christian Zimmy !¹ What was it?"

"Well, it was because of your placing Mohammed above all the prophets, and the chiefest of mankind, quite contrary to thine own Coran and tradition ; for these place Jesus far above all the prophets and messengers of the Lord."

'Whereupon I replied, "Bring me the proof thereof, if thou be one of those that speak the truth."

"I have six reasons," he answered ; "four from the Coran, and two from tradition. Of those from the Coran : First, Jesus is called the 'Word of God' and 'His Spirit,' Mohammed only a Messenger from God ; and without doubt the spirit of any one is far above his messenger. Second, His supernatural birth ; for if He had not some special relation to the Deity, then why this wonderful conception? Third, Miracles such as no prophet, either before or after, hath ever shown. Fourth, Christ was entirely free from sin ; whereas the Coran mentions the need of the greatest of the patriarchs and prophets (as Noah,

¹ Dzimmy, name for Jews and Christians, as a dependent and protected race.

Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon) for the pardon of their sins ; and as regards Mohammed himself, the Coran speaks of 'the forgiving of his former and of his subsequent sins' (Sura *Al Fath* xliv. v. 2), and also that God 'hath eased the burden which galled thy back' (Sura xciv. v. 2, 3). Of Jesus, on the contrary, it is never mentioned that He asked for pardon, or that the Lord pardoned Him ; from all which we gather that Jesus stood singular and alone of all the prophets in nature, rank and sinless perfection.

"Now from tradition," continued my Christian friend, "there is, first, this tradition in the collection of the Imam Muslim : 'One day Mohammed told Ayesha that every child, born of the seed of Adam, received the prick of Satan at its birth, and was affected thereby, excepting only the Son of Mary and His mother' ; so that, according to this saying of the Prophet, the sting of Satan affected all the prophets at their birth, himself not excepted, saving only the Messiah and His mother ; and the absence of power in Satan, the accursed, to touch Him alone, is proof of His being above all others. Second, We find the following tradition as given by the Imam Ghazaly : 'When Jesus, son of Mary, on whom be blessing, was born, the devils came to Satan, saying, that in the morning the idols were found all hanging down their heads. Satan could not understand this, till in his rounds he discovered that Jesus had just been born, and that the angels were around Him, rejoicing thereat. So he returned to the devils and told them that the day before a prophet had been born ; and

that never had a mortal man been born before, at whose birth he had not been present, but only this; and so the devils despaired of any idols being ever worshipped after that night, as they had been before.' ”

“ Now these six evidences,” continued my Christian friend, “ taken from your own books, should raise the rank of Jesus Christ in your hearts far above that of Mohammed. Being called ‘ the Word of God ’ and ‘ His Spirit ’ ; supernatural birth ; surrounded at birth by the angelic host, lest the evil one should come near to touch Him ; freedom from sin ;—can these things be without meaning ? No, by my life ! And every mention of Messiah in the Coran doth but lead you back to the Tourât and the Gospel, ‘ the Light and the Guide,’ as the Coran calls them, which make all clear. How much, then, are we not indebted to Mohammed for this invaluable testimony ! And truly, O Sheikh, if I were a Moslem like yourself, I should give no rest to my soul until I found a solution to these momentous questions. It is a marvel to me to see your learned doctors casting these blessed Scriptures behind their backs, as if simply to ignore them were a sufficient answer.”

‘ So far spoke my Christian friend ; and having heard it all, I said : “ Enough, O Christian Jimmy ! I will look into this matter, if the Lord will.” So we parted ; but my heart was burdened with these weighty arguments, and ever after I used, as it were, to hear a voice saying to me, “ O Aly ! what thinkest thou of these things, their secret and their cause ? ” ’

Then Hasan Effendy, by the Mufty's leave, said: 'These mysteries, no doubt, have a cause and an explanation; but as it has not been revealed in the Coran, the Lord alone knoweth, and with Him we leave it. In so far, however, as Sheikh Aly has referred us for answer to the Christian Scriptures, we cannot accept them as conclusive, seeing that they have been in the hands of unscrupulous corrupters.'

Sheikh Abd ul Hady then obtained the Mufty's leave to reply to this objection, as Sheikh Aly must have been tired speaking, and answered as follows: 'Sheikh Aly,' he said, 'has already, in reply to the Mufty, given proof of the genuineness of the Old Testament; and the Old Testament is proof of the genuineness of the New, because of its corresponding therewith in their common end and object—the New being, as it were, the key to the prophecies of the Old. But if ye will, please state what you consider evidence of corruption, and we shall then reply.'

Hasan.—'Well, then, there is (1) The assertion of the divinity of Jesus, though He was subject to human infirmity, and (as you say) suffered death; (2) Denial of His mission by the Jews; and (3) Variations and contradictions in the Scriptures themselves.'

Abd ul Hady.—'Now, first, please mention the discrepancies.'

Hasan.—'Here are a few. Matthew mentions two blind men cured; the other Gospels only one. Matthew speaks of bringing an ass and its foal to Jesus; Mark, only the foal. In Acts ix. 7 the men

with Paul heard a voice ; in chapter xxii. they heard no voice. Paul holds that faith saves without works ; James, that works do justify. These are a few specimens. Such confusion and contradiction are clear proof of corruption.'

Abd ul Hady.—'In respect of the human infirmities of Jesus, they were all necessary to establish His perfect manhood ; just as miracles and sinlessness were necessary to establish His Divine claim. The union of the two natures was possible with God, with whom nothing is impossible ; and it became necessary, when He desired that His Son should appear in the form of a servant, in order to effect the great purpose of man's salvation. As respects the denial of the Jews, had they wished to tamper with their books, would it not have been in texts relating to the Saviour, and those also which denounce their declensions and idolatry? the existence of which are presumptive evidence that they dare not touch their sacred text.'

The minor discrepancies were next explained by Abd ul Hady, who then proceeded to the case of faith and works ;—

'There was here no contradiction,' he said ; 'but teachings which necessarily differed in respect of the views of those addressed ; the one party leaning upon Jewish ordinances and works, without faith ; the other, on faith not accredited by works—the discrepancy being in appearance only.'

The Cazez, admitting that much had been explained, still held that some of the minor differences

remained, and were proof that the text was not to be relied on.

Sheikh Ahmed smiled, and said that he thought his argument had really prevailed ; for, had tampering been intended, it would surely have been in more important matters ; and further, that apparent contradictions being allowed to remain, was rather an argument that the books were exactly as written by their inspired authors. 'But now,' he continued, 'allow me to ask your Honour one question : This tampering with the Scriptures, was it before or after Mohammed ?'

Cazee (after a pause).—'Will you, my good friend, pass over this question for the present ?'

'Nay,' replied the other ; 'how can we pass it over ? It is the very key of the door I am unlocking.'

The Cazee blushed, his forehead was bedewed, and he turned to his fellows, as if for help.

Abd ul Rahim whispered to say, 'After Mohammed ;' to which the Cazee replied,—

'No, I cannot at the present moment speak ; but it is open to thee to make this answer ; the responsibility is with thee.'

So Abd ul Rahim spoke out : 'Well, I say that the corruption was after the Prophet's time.'

Abd ul Hady.—'Mohammed arose a prophet six centuries after Christ, at a time when Christian kingdoms prevailed all over the world, of every variety of tongue and literature, and the Scriptures were in the hands of all, translated thus into their various languages. Now, long before that time, the

Christians had broken off into a multitude of sects as Arians, Nestorians, Paulicians. These were hostile one to the other ; and yet they all based their differences on the same sacred text. Such being the case, you admit that there was no corruption before the age of Mohammed in the Scriptures, as attested by the Coran. Now, if there was no corruption before, with all these opposing sects, different doctrines, and varying ritual, is it possible that there could have been any afterwards ?'

Abd ul Rahim.—'Quite possible.'

Abd ul Hady.—'I had not expected from so shrewd a disputant this reply. How could it have been possible, unless they had all agreed in the alterations ? And had they agreed, they would surely have first settled their differences, and come to one religion, ritual and doctrine. But they continued in their variances and hatred ; and here you still find them opposed to one another, and yet holding to one and the same Book in their different tongues and divers Churches—a clear proof that there has been no tampering with their Scriptures. So that if these were not corrupted before the rise of Islam, they could not possibly have been corrupted after. Now, I ask again : Men do not enter on an action without an object ; what possible object could the Christians have had in falsifying their Scriptures ?'

Abd ul Rahim.—'I know not. Do people always tell the object of what they are doing ?'

Abd ul Hady.—'No. But here the indictment is made, that people altered the Book for a purpose ;

and yet they are found all to disagree, and to be in violent opposition one to the other ; and in that case it behoves the accuser to say what the object was. Is it not so, noble Cazee ?'

'It is,' replied the Cazee.

Abd ul Hady.—'Then you are prepared to admit the Scriptures to be free from corruption ?'

Cazee.—'Well, I cannot say that ; but I shall see hereafter what to say in answer.'

Abd ul Hady.—'Good. I will but add, that if the Churches could have had an object, it would surely have been to remove those passages which condemn such portions of their teaching, rites and ritual, and modes of worship, as are opposed to the Scripture ; and lead each of the opposing sects to do this in accord with its own practice. In particular, would they not have removed the stringent commands against the use of images and pictures, and worship of the creature ?—practices which prevailed, and still prevail, in many of the chief Churches. But thanks to God, they never ventured to stretch out their hand against these ; and there they remain, a witness against their declension from the truth.'

Abd ul Hady then gathers up his argument in an eloquent peroration, ending with the metaphor that the Bible is an eternal pillar of faith, with its pedestal on earth, and its capital reaching even to the heavens.

At this point the Cazee said to his brethren : 'We have had enough for the present, and the time is far gone, being now the seventh hour of the day ; and it is evident that there is no advantage in continuing

our discussion with these our friends. How true is the saying in the blessed Book: "Verily thou canst not direct whom thou wilt; but God directeth whom He pleaseth" (Sura xxviii. 57).'

Then they arose and went their way.

As they walked together, Abd ul Rahim asked his companions whether they thought he had done wrong in saying that the Gospel was corrupted after the rise of Islam; for if not changed before, it could hardly, for the divers reasons given, have been so after. 'Perhaps I should have said it was corrupted *before*?'

Hasan.—'The Coran distinctly accredits the Scriptures as then in the hands of Jews and Christians. What could have made you think of such a thing?'

Abd ul Rahim.—'Just because of these verses in the Coran: "O Prophet, let not those grieve thee who hasten after infidelity, those who say, 'We believe,' with their mouths, but their hearts believe not; or of Jews who give ear to a lie—give ear to other people, and come not unto thee: they pervert the words from out of their places" (Sura v. v. 47). Now who may these be who "pervert the words" but the people of the Book?'

Mufty.—'We must look at the interpretation of the passage, which does not in reality help you, for Al Râzy takes the "perversion" to mean the denial of certain truths in their books, not the changing of the text. These are his words: "They change the words from their places," that is, from where the Lord hath placed them, meaning the imposition of

obligations, or release therefrom, or the hallowing of certain things. This is illustrated by the tradition of the adulterer and adulteress of Khyber, regarding whom the Jews concealed the passages containing the order for stoning; but there was no imputation of falsification, only of hiding a certain text. Or it may be, according to Râzy, they perverted the reading with their tongues, not the Tourât itself. So, again: "Of the Jews, there are some who change the words from their places" (Sura iv. 45); of which instances are given again, without any imputation of touching the text; and once more: "Woe to those who write out passages, and then say, 'This is from God,' thinking thereby to deceive Mohammed" (Sura ii. v. 79). And if you say, How could this be possible, if copies of the Tourât were scattered over the East and West? I answer (1) That those learned in the Jewish Scriptures were but few at Medina, and therefore could without difficulty palm off such altered passages; or (2), More likely, the meaning of this "perversion" may have been the giving a false interpretation to passages, thus changing words from their true meaning to a false, just as heretics do in our day; or (3), yet again, as Râzy puts it, "They used to visit Mohammed and ask him questions, then go out and misrepresent his words, thus changing or perverting them." We Moslems cannot hold that the Book was corrupted before the Prophet's era, there being so many passages attesting its genuineness, without any imputation of falsification, but the reverse; the only imputation being that the testimony the Book

contained in favour of our Prophet was withheld. Thus, in Sura Bacr : "They to whom we have given the Scripture know him (*i.e.*, our Apostle), even as they know their own children ; but a party amongst them hide the truth, although they know it" (Sura ii. v. 148). So also Sura Imran : "O people of the Book ! why do ye clothe the truth with what is false, and hide the truth, although ye know it ?" (Sura iii. v. 70). These passages clearly recognise the authority of the Book, and only charge against the Jews the withholding of its contents ; and even that not against all, but only against "a party" of them, who opposed our Prophet's claims. What place, then, is there for imputing falsification of the Scripture to their possessors, prior to the time of our Prophet ? To say this would be like him who, flying from the scorpion, is stung by the snake.'

So the Imam Abd ul Rahim was convinced, and, much ashamed, confessed that he had made a slip in his suggestion.

Then they departed each his own way.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCUSSION CONTINUED BETWEEN THE CAZEE AND SHEIKH ALY.

THE Cazee, depressed at the success with which Sheikh Aly and his companions had defended their position, retired to his chamber, and kept ruminating over the discussion, the strength of the Christian arguments, and ease with which those of his own party had been put aside. 'It was as if we fled from a shower of pebbles; or rather, as if without weapons we went forth to attack an enemy clad in an impenetrable panoply. Clearly, so far as the charge of falsification, there is no hope of success; the proofs are all against us. What then shall we do?' Much troubled, sleep fled from his eyes till morning, and he awoke late in the day, when his thoughts reverted to the controversy. 'Why should I not carry the war into the enemy's camp,' he said suddenly to himself, 'and challenge them to rebut our proofs?' So he went over the various arguments for Islam, the Unity revealed, the Arabs converted, the marvellous spread of the faith. 'I will lay these before Sheikh Aly, if haply they may convince him.' So he sent to say he would meet him that evening in a chamber at the City Hall.

As regards the Christian company, they were much encouraged by the discussion. This new call of the Cazeé gave them fresh hopes, and they sought the Lord's blessing on the conference. At the appointed time and place the two met ; and the Cazeé, when they had sat down, said he had sought this second meeting in pursuance of a thought that had occurred to him in the morning, and asked a patient hearing, which when Sheikh Aly had promised, he proceeded thus.

‘ My dear friend, I am going to ask you to call to mind the prophetic claim of Mohammed, on whom be peace and blessing ! Listen to me, and be not one of the stiff-necked. Think how he called the heathen tribes of Arabia to the worship of the true God ; how, in the midst of a people that gloried in the worship of Lat and Ozza, he preached the UNITY. Whence, but from Divine inspiration, did he gain that wonderful doctrine, in the midst of a nation having gods many and lords many ?—he, unlearned, unable even to read or write, a poor, needy, solitary orphan, alone in the faith. How could such a one, except by inspiration, have given us that marvellous Coran, “ the like of which man and genii, let them unite all together, could never produce ” ? That God should have made him victorious over the idolatrous Coreish and heathen Arabia ; that his followers of the Coreish and the Ansâr (Citizens) of Medina should have so rapidly increased ; and that the faith should, in an inconceivably short space of time, have spread over Arabia, Syria, Irac, and other strange lands ;—is not all this clear proof of the Divine mission of our Prophet, that

he was inspired to be a warner and a preacher of glad tidings to the whole of mankind?—so clear, you might say, that he who denies it might as well deny that the sun shines at mid-day.'

Aly tried at first to excuse himself from entering on the discussion of the prophetic claim of Mohammed, unless forced to it. But pressed, he proceeded thus;—He used, he said, himself to have the same ideas as the Cazeé, and did not yield to him in pressing them upon learned Christians, as an unassailable proof of Islam, until the veil fell from his eyes, and he found he had been, as it were, wandering in a maze.

Cazeé.—'How was that? Speak freely, my friend. Do not fear, nor be ashamed to do so.'

Aly, after thanking him for this free liberty, proceeded to say that Mohammed's proclaiming the Unity was proof not of his prophetic claim, but of his power and sagacity of intellect; for the conception was clearly within the scope of human knowledge. Nor was the doctrine itself unknown in Arabia. It was held by the Jewish tribes, which occupied a prominent position in the land, as well as by the Christians, such as the inhabitants of Najran, the Beni Kinda, and others. The Prophet himself also repeatedly passed from the Hejaz into Syria, and there saw monasteries and churches, and must have met monks and clergy, from whom he may have learned much; for in the Coran many of the monks and clergy are spoken of as patterns of virtue and piety.

'Nor can evidence be drawn from the rapid spread

of Islam, for its success was due to the sword ; not like Christianity, which prevailed with the help neither of sword nor spear, but by the power of God, and in spite of persecution. Moreover, Islam has long been declining in its power, while Christianity ceases not to wax and grow marvellously in every land and clime. Your Prophet also showed no sign, as did Moses, who came to his brethren with two signs, as proof that God had sent him to deliver them out of the land of Egypt. And again, Mohammed denied the truths revealed in former Scripture.'

Cazee.—'Mohammed surely did not deny the Scripture revealed before him ; but, on the contrary, attested the same. For, see Sura Bacr : "And when there came unto them an apostle, confirming the Scripture that was with them, a party from amongst those to whom the Scripture was given cast the Book of God behind their backs, as if they knew it not" (Sura ii. v. 98). And again, in Sura Imran : "He hath sent down unto thee the Book with truth, confirming that (revealed) before it ; for He had sent down the Tourât and the Gospel aforetime, a direction unto men," etc. (iii. v. 2). It is clear that the Apostle of God did come, confirming the previous Scriptures, both of the Jews and the Christians ; how then, my friend, can you say the contrary? Then, again, on the other point, have you forgotten the many signs and miracles Mohammed showed, as the moon split in two parts, one part over Mount Cobeis, the other over the hill Caynocâa,—raising his parents for a season to life, so that they professed their faith in Islam,

and then returned to the dead,—bringing forth water at Majaz,—raising to life the son of a woman of Medina,—multiplying viands out of a little, and such-like? Strange that you should have forgotten all this, my friend, witnessed to as they have been by a multitude of pious folk.'

Aly smiled as the Çazee went over this long list of miracles.

'God forbid, my friend,' he said, 'that I should be a party to fabricating such stories, either for or against the Prophet of Islam. As regards your first point—it is clear that there are many passages in which the Coran attests the preceding Scriptures; but we must look closer, and then we find that many essential truths in them are denied, as the incarnation, crucifixion, and atoning death of Jesus. Not only are the Scriptures, as we have seen before, authentic, but these truths had already been distinctly acknowledged by the Christian Church. Long prior to Islam, the Council of Nicæa, under the first Christian monarch, and attended by a multitude of bishops from Christian lands, was assembled to consider the teaching of Arius, who denied the eternal generation of the Son, and equality with the Father in essence and dignity, and after a prolonged discussion, unanimously condemned the heresy. And, indeed, a glance at the Scriptures, as extant in every country and language of the world, old and new, shows that their great object is to represent the Messiah as Divine, God and man, and His death as an atoning sacrifice. You might as well deny

the sun's light as this their acknowledged purpose. What, then, was the advantage of the Prophet confirming the Scriptures revealed before, when he denied these their essential truths? I am lost in amazement to think how he could have said all this when there were everywhere thousands and thousands of copies of the Book extant at the time, all bearing testimony with clear voice to these precious truths—the eternity of Christ, His offering Himself up to fulfil the Father's will, and the sanctification of believers through this one offering of Himself. And truly, my friend, had Mohammed really accredited the Scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians around him, he had without doubt been himself a Christian. So that his claim in this respect falls to the ground.

'Next, as regards the alleged miracles of the Prophet, described in tradition and biographies of Mohammed, I say truly to my friend, that, when myself of the Moslem faith, making my boast thereof, and glorying in the Prophet, I never ventured to mention them before Jews and Christians. Indeed, I felt much shame when asked about them; and I marvel that my learned friend speaks of the same as real, with the Coran in your hands.'

Cazee.—'Now, where is there anything in the Coran about them?'

Ally again expressed his amazement; and the Cazee blushed as he added: 'Really, I cannot call it to mind. Enlighten me; it will be a favour unto me.'

Aly.—‘ With pleasure, my friend. There are not many passages ; but I will mention these ; (1) Sura Thunder : “ The infidels say, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his Lord (we will not believe), but thou art only a warner ” (S. xiii. 9) ; and again : “ It is not given to any prophet to come with a sign, unless by permission of God ” (*Ibid.* v. 41). And yet again, in the same Sura : “ The unbelievers will say, Thou art not sent of God. Say, Verily God is a sufficient witness between me and you, and whosoever understandeth the Book ” (v. 45). (2) Sura the Spider : “ They say, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his Lord (we will not believe). Say, Signs are from God alone, and I am nothing more than a public preacher ” (S. xxix. v. 50). (3) Lastly, in Sura Beni Israil : “ Nothing hindered us from sending thee with miracles, excepting that the former peoples gave them the lie ” (S. xvii. v. 60). These passages indicate clearly that Mohammed did not claim to show miracles like Moses, Jesus, and the other prophets. If Moslems then bring tradition to prove miracles, when the Coran distinctly holds that the Prophet showed none, say, my good friend, whether that is not putting the greatest possible slight on the Coran itself ? ’

The Cazee waited a little, evidently taken unawares, perplexed and downcast. Then in a grave voice,—

‘ I must consider the bearing of these verses further, and consult Beidhawy.’

‘ Very good,’ replied Aly ; ‘ but surely the meaning is clear enough, without reference to commentators. I have an extract here, however, from the same

Beidhawy, which you might hear and think over at your leisure.'

Cazee.—' Good, my friend.'

Aly.—' Here it is. Commenting on the last verse (S. xvii. v. 60), he says :—"That is to say, We have only abstained from sending thee with miracles," as the Coreish demand, "because the former peoples"—those of like temper with them, as the tribes of Ad and Thamud—"gave them the lie," and so likewise would these men of Mecca ; "and they would otherwise have been destroyed, according to our wont," (*i.e.* if they had rejected the miracles) ; so "we determined not to destroy them," seeing that there are amongst them those that believe, or will have believing seed.'

The Cazee, on hearing this extract, said : ' True, that was the reason why the Lord did not send His Prophet with miracles. It is clear that tradition is here at fault, and deserves no attention. I thank thee, Sheikh Aly, for bringing all this to my notice, which I had overlooked.'

' But now,' continued the Cazee, ' I will ask you whether the Coran itself is not a miracle? for its sublime language, inimitable beauty and heavenly utterances raise it altogether beyond the range of human possibilities.'

' No,' replied Aly ; ' a miracle is that which is outside the course of Nature and its laws,—such as raising of the dead. The composition of a book, however beautiful and grand, is not a miracle, but a wonderful work of man's genius, like those of the old Arab poets, as

Imrulcays, Mutanabby, Harîry, Coss, and Lokman, who produced poems and tales of exquisite pathos and eloquence; and as these are not miracles, no more is the Coran. Moreover, the greatest part of the stories, and the finest, are taken from the Old Testament; and certain of them, as the narrative of the creation, the flood, Abraham offering Isaac, the histories of Lot, Joseph, Moses, and Pharaoh, etc., are repeated over and over, some even as many as ten times, in different parts of the Coran. If all these were taken away, what of the miracle would remain?’

Cazee.—‘That is all true; but, then, consider that the writer was entirely unlearned; and, as such, to compose so wonderful a work, may we not regard that a miracle?’

Aly.—‘Everything conceded, it is still within the limits of human intellect. The Tourât and Gospel are not *miracles*, but a revelation; and miracles are given to prove the revelation. And then we all know in what way the various Suras and verses of the Coran were collected, and how difficult it would be, were we to demand legal proof, to make certain what portion of them really came from the Prophet himself.’

The Cazee at last agreed that as a mere composition the Coran could not be held a miracle; but still argued that its elevated teaching and sentiment altogether surpassed the range and ability of the men of the time.

Aly.—‘Yes, I agree with you there. The intellectual power and spiritual elevation of Mohammed are marvellous. But for a little will you return with me, and

let me ask, Wherefore was it that the Prophet fell back on the testimony of the Tourât and Gospel ?'

Cazee.—' In order to tell of the creation and fall, the story of Mary and Zacharias, and other such histories, as well as of the origin of certain ritual observances.'

Aly.—' But then he omitted the most important of all the truths, or denied them.'

Cazee.—' What may these be ?'

Aly.—' Some have already been spoken of. He has shown us the fall and expulsion from Paradise, but not the way of pardon and restoration. Now again, observe the promise to Abraham of "a wise son" (Sura xxxvii. vers. 97-108). It is there implied that it was Ismael, not Isaac (yet unborn at the time), who was to be offered up ; and he leaves out the kernel of the grand promise, viz., that "in his seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed;" namely, in Isaac's posterity.'

Cazee.—' How do you prove that ?'

Aly.—' In various ways. (1) The promise was given at the time when Abraham was about to offer up his son Isaac (Gen. xxii.) ; (2) When Sarah wished Abraham to turn away Hagar, Abraham was told to listen to her, "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. xxi. 12) ; (3) The promise was repeated to Isaac (as in Gen. xxvi. 4), when the Lord thus spake to him, after his father's death, "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give thy seed all these lands ; and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed" ; and again to Jacob, when going to the land of Haran (Gen. xxviii. 14) : "Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread

abroad to the west and east, and to the north and to the south, and in thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed." So, my friend, you see that the promise clearly was to the progeny of Isaac and Jacob.'

Cazee.—'What, then, do you build on it all?'

Aly.—'Why, this, that the promise of that seed in which all nations of the earth were to be blessed ran not in the line of the Arab nation, but in the line of Isaac and Jacob; the promise, namely, of Jesus, son of Mary, the Saviour of the world.'

Cazee.—'You have indeed cast out father Ismael, together with his mother Hagar, from his father's house, and from the blessing; and yet it was from him our grand Arab nation did descend, with all its famous tribes and chiefs; and that, too, without the blessing of God!'

Aly.—'Nay, my friend, I say not that. God did bless the race of Ismael, and promised to make of him a great nation, but the promise rested with Isaac. To the same effect in the Sura Spider: "We have given to him (Abraham), Isaac and Jacob, and have placed among his progeny the gift of prophecy" (Sura xxix. 25). Thus the promise is not to Ismael, though the first-born. He was left out of account, as having no spiritual portion. Isaac and Jacob are raised above him, and "prophecy and revelation" placed in their line, not his.'

Cazee.—'But how can you tell that the promise was limited to it alone? The promise to Abraham's progeny might have been in more than one line.'

Aly.—‘ There is yet another passage in Sura, The Kneeling : “ Verily We gave to the children of Israel the Scriptures, and wisdom, and prophecy ; and We fed them with good things, and preferred (فضلنا) them above all the nations ” (S. xlv. 15). Is not that a confirmation of the promise that in this line, and in it preferentially, all nations should be blessed ? ’

When they had got so far in their argument, it being now late, further discussion was stayed. The Cazee, after a moment’s reflection, raised his head, and said,—

‘ Yes, my friend Sheikh Aly, that verse is conclusive. Now the day is far spent. What has passed must suffice for the night. But, if you please, I will come again on the third evening to resume the discussion.’

Aly.—‘ As it may please your Honour ; but before we part, let me say one word more.’

Cazee.—‘ Say on, dear friend.’

Aly.—‘ The promise, as we have seen, is in the line of Isaac. How, then, can it point to any other than to Christ, the greatest of all the prophets ? The Tourât and the Gospel proceed from that people. From whence, then, should we seek for guidance to the knowledge of God, and His will concerning us, but from the same Scriptures which are declared by the Coran itself to be a “ light and a guide ” ; a “ guide and instruction to the pious ” ; “ perfect and complete in every respect, a guide and a mercy ” ;¹—Scriptures which initiate us in the mystery of Christ, and so

¹ SS. xxxvii. 8 ; v. 47 ; vi. 154.

remove the insuperable difficulty which every Moslem must see in the various passages concerning Him in the Coran. My friend, forget not this, nor cast it aside ; for herein is the blessing and life, and without it none.'

Cazee.—' I thank thee, my good friend, and I hope to resume our conference at the appointed time, if the Lord will.'

And so they arose and departed.

The scene changes to the Cazee's chamber. On reaching home he retires, and takes up the Coran. Going over the various passages again and again, he pauses as he repeats : ' We gave to Isaac and to Jacob,' ' We gave '—' Isaac and Jacob ' ;—in trouble and perplexity, over and again. ' But where is Ismael? Not " given," but born in the ordinary course.' After pondering awhile he goes on :—' " We gave prophecy and revelation " in his line,' and he places his finger on the parallel passage, " We gave the Scripture, and wisdom, and prophecy to the children of Israël," and,' with finger still on the text, " a light and guidance "—all, all in the line of Isaac. Ah me! ah me! All nations blessed in them. Why, then, another revelation from one of another nation, one strange to the Israelites?' Looking forward with perplexity to the next meeting : ' What if the truth be with him?' As thus for a long time he leaned his face upon his knee, he suddenly started up, recollecting the promise to Moses that God would raise up ' from amongst his brethren ' a prophet like unto him, whom they would hear. ' That must mean, not of Israel, but of another branch,

and what other branch but Ismael's? and what other prophet but Mohammed? Even so, would not this supersede the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and the religion built thereon—Scriptures spoken of in the Coran as a perfect guide? I do not see the way out of it, excepting that I bring it up in discussion with my friend, and see whether he can set it aside or not.'

And so he lay down and fell asleep.

On the appointed evening the Cazee repaired to the place of meeting, and sent for Sheikh Aly.

Cazee.—' You see I have returned to renew our discussion on the points raised the other night; in addition to which there is one which I then forgot, namely, that which the Lord said to Moses: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; . . . and I will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19). Now, this prophet is undoubtedly our Prophet on whom be blessing and peace.'

Aly.—' What, then, is your proof that this refers to Mohammed, of the Arab race?'

Cazee.—' The prophet was to be "of thy brethren," *i.e.*, not of the Beni Israel. Moses is addressed in person; and so also the race of Moses, the Beni Israel, signifies a single race; and the prophet was to be of their brethren, not one of themselves. Again, he was to be a prophet like unto Moses, a lawgiver,

leader and commander, to execute judgment on the heathen ; not like Jesus, the meek and lowly. Who could this be but Mohammed, the Coreishite, who answers every way to the description ?'

Aly.—' This is the argument in the *Sîrat, or Biography of the Prophet*, and good, if proved. Let us look, then, at the text in the Hebrew. Verse 15 of the chapter quoted says that the prophet is to be raised up "*from the midst of thee*, of thy brethren, like unto me," which words signify from amongst the children of Israel, not from amongst others ; the words underlined being added to enforce the limitation.'

Cazee.—' If these words be there, then there can be no doubt it must be so.'

Aly.—' No doubt of it ; and the same expression is used in the chapter preceding : " One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee " (xvii. 15), signifying from among the children of Israel, not strangers ; and the same as to the coming prophet. The prophecy of a coming prophet must therefore mean a descendant *from the midst of the children of Israel*, neither Ismaelite nor Midianite, and therefore cannot refer to Mohammed.¹ The prophecy must refer to Christ, who resembled Moses in these respects :—(1) Moses was the mouth-piece (كليم) of the Lord ; Jesus, the " Word of God," and giver of the Gospel ; (2) Moses was mediator of the old covenant between God and the Israelites ; Jesus, the mediator of the new—that is, of grace and mercy between God

¹ The argument is pursued at considerable length, and with somewhat recondite reasoning.

and man ; (3) Moses was the leader of his people to the promised land ; Jesus, to the rest above ; (4) Moses delivered his people out of the bondage of Pharaoh ; Jesus, from that of Satan ; (5) Moses fought against the enemies of the Lord ; Jesus will shortly destroy His enemies, and put all things under His feet.'

Cazec.—'These similarities are all, excepting the first two, spiritual, whereas what we are led to expect is an outward and material likeness.'

Aly.—'Surely the spiritual similarity is what is meant. But now as regards Mohammed, there are these points of essential difference : Moses showed wonderful miracles, Mahomet none ; Moses fed his people forty years in the wilderness with bread from heaven. Wherein is there any resemblance here ?'

Then gathering up the argument, Aly drew the conclusion that none other than Jesus could be meant as the coming prophet, both from the indications in the Coran and also in the Old Testament ; and he put it to the Cazec to admit either that Mohammed was not the prophet there promised, or that both the Coran and Tourât were mistaken.

Cazec.—Well, supposing all this to be true, is it not the case that the Tourât predicts that Mohammed, the Arabian, will follow Jesus as the last of the prophets ?'

Aly, with a sigh.—'Alas ! good Cazec, I had not thought that a learned one like you could have believed such a passage to be in the Old Testament.'

Cazec.—'Why not ? In the *Biography of the*

Prophet, by Mian Ahmad Zeiny, of Mecca, there are given traditions from certain of the Companions of Mohammed, who tell us that in the Tourât there is a prediction of a great prophet to arise out of the seed of Ismael, called Ahmed; and that in the Psalms a variety of names are given to this coming prophet (as Hamyât, Tâb-tâb, etc.); and in the Gospels, Baraklete, meaning Ahmed, or "the Praised"; and further, it is said that Mohammed himself told Omar that he had been foretold by these names.'

Aly.—'But how can you prove the truth of all these stories?'

Cazee.—'Well, if they are not true, what traditions are we to believe?'

Aly.—'I pray you to excuse my answering that.'

Cazee.—'Nay, thou must answer freely. Hast thou seen anything in me to cause alarm? There is none between us but God alone. Speak, and fear not.'

Aly.—'Then I say that there is no ground whatever for any one of such passages being in the Tourât or Psalms. I marvel exceedingly at the Prophet having made any such claim (if, indeed, he ever did); or rather, at it having been made for him. Not one of the names you mention appears in the Tourât, and it is matter of utter astonishment that any such stories should ever have been circulated. True, there is in the Gospel the promise that the Baraklete (the Comforter) would descend after Christ's ascension, into the hearts of the disciples, and would strengthen and

enlighten them, and bring the sayings of Jesus back to their remembrance ; also, that He would endue them with the power of working miracles, in proof of the good tidings they were to publish, and as a seal of their ministry. It is easy to make such assertions as you have referred to, but difficult to prove them. Just look at the passage preceding that which you quoted from the *Biography*. There the Prophet is represented as telling Omar that it was he who gave the Tourât to Moses, the Psalms to David, and the Gospel to Jesus ;—foolish things, opposed both to Scripture and reason, which unscrupulous people have foisted upon Mohammed, to magnify him in the eyes of the simple and credulous. Can any faith be put in such effusions? What thinkest thou, my friend?’

Cazec (in a subdued voice, lest any should hear him from without) :—‘ That is enough, Sheikh Aly. Truly you have done your best to discredit both the Prophet and his Companions.’

Aly.—‘ I wished to avoid all this ; but you would not let me off saying all that was in my heart—pleasing or displeasing. I have only tried to speak the truth. Pardon me.’

Cazec.—‘ By no means ; I am not vexed or offended in any wise with you, my friend. You have said nothing out of place, nor stepped beyond the right of controversy. Knowing your fairness and self-restraint, I entered on this arena, intending to stop when I had reached the proper limit ; and not without the hope of being successful, or, at the least, by your

kindness, of gaining some advantage; but it would appear that this hope has gone to the winds.'

Aly.—'I was, as thou knowest, zealous beyond my equals in jealous attachment to Islam, and study of its authorities; but it cannot have escaped you, my friend, and truly the Searcher of hearts knoweth, that I was always pained at such-like stories and traditions, for which I found no ground, either in the Old or New Testament; and when our Doctors used to parade them as arguments, I only laughed in my sleeve at their credulity. It is just such traditions that first led me, disputing with Jews and Christians, to doubt the whole ground-work of Islam. And so things went on, till the Lord was pleased to open my eyes, and led me thus into the way of truth. And why shouldest not thou, my dear friend, embrace this same way—the way of that blessed Saviour, who, in the Coran, as well as in the Gospel, is exalted far above all other prophets?'

The Cazee sat for some time lost in thought. At last he arose, saying: 'Praise be to the Lord, and may He grant us a favourable ending!' Then he thanked Aly, and hoped to return again, at some future time, to such pleasant and profitable intercourse.

Aly, too, arose, and they both, after shaking hands, parted one from the other.

As the Cazee wended his way home, he kept revolving in his mind the stories about Mohammed's miracles, and the pretended prophecies about him in the Tourât, though there existed absolutely none such

in reality, seeing that the tales were in opposition to the Coran itself. 'I take refuge in the Lord,' he cried; 'there is no resource nor refuge but in Him; His mercy guide us!'

Sheikh Aly, on the other hand, returned rejoicing to his people, who were thankful at all he was able to tell them of his conference with the Cazeer.

CHAPTER XII.

EXILE TO DEYR AL CAMR, AND RETURN.

NEXT morning, the Mufty, having heard of the conference, visited the Cazee, and hoped the result had been satisfactory. The Cazee gave him shortly an outline of what had passed. The Mufty, taken aback, sat for some time thinking. At last he said,—

‘ I have always felt it a mistake putting such traditions as you speak of in our religious books. I have gone over the Old and New Testaments repeatedly, and never have found anything of the kind in them. Thinking that possibly they might have been expunged by the Christians, I once referred to a Jewish rabbi of known probity, who assured me, on the most solemn of Jewish oaths, that there was no mention of such things in their Scripture. And my friend will remember the late Sheikh Abbas Ismael Ahmed, who learned Hebrew by the aid of a Jewish doctor, for the express purpose of being able to judge for himself of the value of these traditions, to which he was extravagantly attached; and when he found that they had no existence in the Tourât, he gave up one article of faith after another, till at length nothing remained but the simple rites and faith of the Khârejites; and when I asked him once, “ How about the testimony to Mohammed in the Tourât ? ”

he laughed and said, "Oh, it is all nonsense." The fact seems to be that the Jews, knowing the Prophet to be unlearned, and wishing to curry favour, told him such-like stories, or rather, perhaps, told them to his Companions, and made them take it all in ; and they, to aggrandize Islam, gave currency to the fictions ; as if, forsooth, they were of the nature of evidence. Would that they were all swept away from our books ! but as every one, both amongst our own people and the Christians, knows all about it, that, of course, would be now out of the question.'

Cazee.—'Strange that our Prophet should have been deceived by the Jews of Medina ; and if deceived by them, where is his prophetic claim ? If liable to be deceived in other matters, why not in the Coran itself, which contradicts both the Old Testament and the New, especially as regards the nature and the death of the Messiah ?'

Mufti.—'Enough for the present. The Lord knoweth what the truth is. Are you not aware that multitudes of our Doctors are in doubt about the faith ? They live resting in the name, but know nothing of its reality.'

Cazee.—'How, then, are we to find a way out of it all ? Can we rest in hypocrisy and falsehood, or not rather search for a path that shall lead us to certainty and truth in respect of the true Messiah and revelation ?'

Mufti.—'Let be for the present. We can resume this weighty question hereafter, if the Lord will ; and He will guide us aright.'

So the Mufty went his way, leaving the Cazee perplexed and troubled in spirit.

On the following day the Waly summoned them both, with the rest of his council, to decide on the country to which the little company should be sent. Some said Rhodes, others, Armenia, others again, Crete. The Cazee (whose habit it was not to speak till all the others had done) was then called on by the Waly.

‘In reply to your Excellency,’ he said, ‘I would suggest, as the most suitable place, some town in the Lebanon. It is outside the province of Damascus.’

The Waly.—‘But it is close at hand, and not like banishment from the land of Syria.’ Then he turned to the chief judge,—

‘Indeed, it is quite close, and, in fact, just like leaving them in their own homes.’

Then the Mufty.—‘Yes, it is near; but it will answer all the objects in view. We are not called on to punish them, but simply to remove them away from the city and neighbourhood, with the view of avoiding further disturbance in the city; and it is sufficiently far off for that.’

The rest of the council opposed this view, saying that the Cazee and Mufty were always on the side of these perverts. The Lebanon would be of no use; offenders like them should be banished to the utmost limits of the empire. The President said that such imputations against the Cazee and Mufty were quite gratuitous. It was their kindly hearts that had influenced them. Some of the company were aged and

infirm, and a lengthened journey would be trying to them—possibly death; and then the government would be blamed. There could be no possible harm or disturbance for Syria in this arrangement. Thereupon the remainder were silent, and at the last the Waly approved the proposal of the Cazeé, on whose judgment he greatly depended. The Cazeé signifying his acknowledgments, the Waly turned to him again,—

‘But what place shall it be in the Lebanon?’

‘Deyr al Camr,’ he replied, ‘it being the farthest from the seat of your Excellency’s government.’

So it was agreed that they should be sent away there, on the 14th of the month, after midnight; but the decision was for the present to be kept secret.

On the 13th of the month it was made known to the company that the time for departure was at hand, but neither the hour nor the destination; and the hearts of some sank within them. But most held themselves bravely, especially after the Cazeé had, by the Waly’s permission, given them some general idea of the direction, and of the arrangements for the journey. So, on the 14th, after midnight, they were unawares aroused, taken out, and mounted on beasts with a guard of fifty regulars, and as many police. They had been asleep but two or three hours, and some were aged, and weak from having been so many days in confinement; and they were affected to tears at having to leave so suddenly, without the opportunity of once again seeing their families. The escort made

them travel all that night and the next day without stopping. During the darkness, as they were carried along, the moon shone forth full and bright—a light, as Sheikh Aly said, that might remind them of the light which was leading them to the rest above. The dawn beginning to break, Sheikh Mehmud said it was like the journey through life to the morning beyond. And then, as the sun arose, Abd ul Rahim spoke of it as a type of the true light, revealing clearly all that had been dark around them. With such reflections they comforted one another, and whiled the time away. Tired and wearied, they besought their conductor to allow them a little rest. At first he refused, but, offered some money, he suffered them to alight at midday, and again in the afternoon and evening. They reached their destination the following midnight, and rested outside the walls until the morning, when they made their entry. The leader then gave his letter to the governor of the district, by whom the company were graciously welcomed, and accommodated in suitable quarters. The escort was then dismissed.

On the morning after their departure, when their friends and families discovered that they had been sent away during the night, they were much distressed, and assembled before the palace, crying out against their covert exile. The Cazee appeared and quieted them; but he could not make known their place of banishment. After a couple of months, however, it oozed out; and then Hasan, the brother, and other relatives of Aly, and a company of the

children, kinsmen, and friends of the others, set out to visit them.

The joy at this meeting was unbounded. The exiles fell upon their necks and wept aloud, shedding tears of affection and delight, and inquired after the welfare of their beloved ones at home. They received also at their friends' hands supplies they had brought of such things as they had need of. Their friends remained with them a fortnight, during which time Aly and his companions taught them many things regarding the Christian faith; and they drank in their words, especially a Sheikh and an Effendy, even as the dry land drinks in the copious showers of rain. Several of them and of their sons were baptized, in the same way as the exiles themselves; for these had been baptized shortly after their arrival at Deyr al Camr. At last they were sent back.

'Return, dear friends,' said the exiles, as they bid them good-bye; 'return now to your homes with the peace of God, and tell them there of our welfare. But forsake not the Book of God and prayer; for light and blessing spring therefrom. Fear not man, but fear God, who hath created you, and breathed into you the breath of life; and we shall hope to meet again in peace.'

So they departed, and talked joyfully by the way of what they had seen and heard. On getting home, they made known to their families the place of exile, their health and welfare, and their kindly treatment by the governor and all the people of the town and country, from the very day of their arrival at Deyr al Camr.

Now love and affection for the exiles had sunk deep into the hearts of the dwellers in the Lebanon. They visited them day and night in great numbers, and held them in high regard for their culture, piety, and learning. They received them with distinction and honour also in their public places, halls, and houses, and whenever they went abroad. Moreover, the heads of the Christian religion, of whatever Church throughout the Lebanon, came to visit them, and rejoiced in their society. Their conversation turned much upon questions of spiritual growth and the interests of the faith, and all marvelled at their rapid advance in the Christian life, their ready apprehension of Scriptural doctrine, and their wisdom, piety, and devotion. The exiles were so filled with gratitude to the people of the town and villages around, that they spake thus one to another:—‘If it were not for the love we bear to our home and country, we should prefer remaining always here, instead of returning to Damascus.’

Now the exile of the Christian company was noised abroad throughout the various lands; and so the narrative thereof came to be published in the European journals. The circumstances thus coming to light, the consuls of the various Powers and other representatives in Syria made inquiry into the matter, and in the end a representation was submitted to the Porte, with the prayer that the Sultan would give permission to the exiles to return at their free discretion to their families and homes. The following rescript was accordingly issued by the Porte:—

‘Let it be known to you that the Christian converts were not expatriated because of their embracing Christianity ; which, indeed, would have been in contravention of Our desire that there should be amongst all Our subjects perfect freedom in the choice of their religion. The reason was, that conversion to Christianity was so new and unusual a thing in Damascus, and the inhabitants thereof so backward in civilization, and so fanatical and intolerant, that, for the peace and safety of the city, and to avoid consequent tumult and disturbance, We consented, on the representation of the authorities, to the converts being sent away for a time to some place without the province. And so they were removed to Deyr al Camr, in the Lebanon, a spot not very far from their homes ; the inhabitants of which, moreover, are all of the Christian faith. Our desire is for the peace and comfort of our subjects, of every faith and race. And so We shall now command our Waly to report to us so soon as there may be no farther apprehension of tumult and disturbance in the city ; and then We shall give orders for their return, in accord with Our desire for the comfort and happiness of all.’

Accordingly, in the beginning of the second year of their exile, an imperial order was issued, permitting return to their homes, and directing such perfect liberty in their profession of faith and performance of religious rites as they might desire.

On receipt of these orders, kept secret from the city the Waly sent an officer with a troop of horse to conduct them from their exile. So, when the officer

arrived at Deyr al Camr, he handed the Waly's letter to the governor of the town, in which permission was given for the return of the exiles to their homes. The governor, and with him all the dwellers of the Lebanon, rejoiced exceedingly at the good news; excepting only that they grieved at the prospect of their separation.

Now, the same evening, the governor and all the chief men of the place assembled publicly in the City Hall to testify their joy at their friends' way having been made free for their return home; as well as to assure them of their grief at the prospect of separation, and the loss their departure would entail upon the town.

To this, Sheikh Aly made reply: 'Words fail to express our sense of the kindness and benefits you have showered upon us—your Excellency, the governor, the authorities of the place, and the whole of the dwellers in the Lebanon and villages around, without exception. We are returning to our city, but our hearts remain captive here to your love and affection, which have been near to making us forget our own city and its people. So long as we live we shall never forget your goodness to us. It is not in our power to repay the favours which you have so abundantly showered upon us; but we ask the Lord (who suffers not even the cup of cold water to be forgotten) that He would grant you an abundant reward.'

To which the governor responded thus: 'They were all conscious,' he said, 'how far the town and district around had come short of their duty to such

angel visitants. The debt they owed for the pleasure and benefit of their society and intercourse, would remain ever in their hearts. The sad distress of their friends and households at Damascus had brought a blessing to the Lebanon, and they thanked God for it, and prayed that He would give their friends a prosperous journey, and every blessing in the future; and finally, they hoped hereafter for tidings from them of their peace and happiness.'

The exiles then took their leave, with expressions of gratitude and thankfulness. Early in the morning they started on their journey, accompanied by their escort, and also by a party of horsemen sent in their honour by the principality to lead them down into the plain. They journeyed leisurely and in comfort, alighting where they liked, and resting as they chose. On the morning of the second day they entered Damascus, and were conducted to the presence of the Waly, who received them with a certain amount of favour. By his desire the order of the Sublime Porte was read aloud to them; and they were dismissed to their homes with the injunction to observe quiet and peace, and warned not to broach the subject of religion in conversation with their Moslem neighbours.

Meanwhile, the expected return of the company becoming known, their families were anxious as to how they would be received in the city, and concerned themselves as to how they should act. Just then in the house of their uncle, Sheikh Hasan, were gathered together the sons of Aly, and the families and brothers of the other exiles, in much solicitude; and they were

talking over the serious aspects of the matter, when a knock was heard at the door. Hasan was startled, and his heart beat quick, for he said, 'That, verily, was like the knock of my brother;' so he hastened and asked who was there.

'Open, O Hasan!' was the answer; and all knew, rejoicing, who it was.

For, opening the door, behold it was even his brother Aly; and he fell on his neck and kissed him, and Aly seized his hands and kissed them, as the drops fell from his eyes for joy. Then the whole party issued forth and welcomed him. And when he told them that all had returned, and were at his house, they flew thither on the wings of joy; and there was passed there a night of rejoicing such as is past description, at reunion after so long a separation.

In the morning, when their return was noised abroad, men began to troop in multitudes to welcome them. Then they returned their friends' visits, and settled down as before; and by their virtuous lives and exemplary citizenship gained a high place in the esteem and respect of all. It is true that Nasir ud Din and his people—their enemies and detractors—maintained their hostility, and indulged in obloquy as before; but few now minded their words.

It was about this time that Ahmed Effendy al Cotely, already mentioned, made public profession of his faith in Christ, and became a zealous adherent of Sheikhs Aly and Mehmud and their party. Ever since becoming an inquirer he had entertained the

highest regard for the epistle which had first arrested their attention. So one day he said to them,—

‘What do we not owe the writer of that beautiful epistle that guided us to the truth! Have you ever sent him any acknowledgment of our thanks and obligations for the great service he has rendered us?’

Sheikh Ahmed replied that they had intended doing so when at Deyr al Camr. ‘But,’ added he, ‘after making inquiries about him and his residence, we heard that he had died some eight months before; and we were distressed that we had not written to him earlier.’

So Al Cotely wrung his hands, saying: ‘Would that he had lived, and seen the fruits of his work!’

‘Yes,’ answered Ahmed; ‘but he will see them in a more glorious way, in the presence of his Lord. The righteous pass away, but their fruits die not. They shall reap the harvest they have sown in that day when not a single grain shall fall to the ground.’

CHAPTER XIII.

DEATH AND FUNERAL OF SHEIKH ALY— CONCLUSION.

FIVE years had passed from the return of the company to Damascus, when Sheikh Aly fell sick of his last illness ; for he was aged, and his strength failed day by day. Sheikhs Mehmud, Ahmed al Hady, Ahmed Effendy, and other friends attended on him, one or other of them hardly ever stirring from his bedside. He did not care for any reading but the Gospel, nor any talk but about our Saviour. In his hours of weakness, when no one was near, he might be heard repeating such words as these : ‘ He died for me.—His love and grace.—Their height and depth.—Redeemed and saved. Oh, when shall I see Him ? ’ And no one left his bedside without his having said something to them of Jesus.

On the day of his death there gathered round his bed a company of Moslems, men of learning and rank in the city. He raised himself to receive them ; then, after they had all sat down for a little, Sheikh Abd ul Hamid, Imam of the Omeyyad Mosque, spoke as follows :—

‘ O Sheikh Aly, my old friend and loved companion, if I say a word to thee about returning to us,

canst thou bear it, out of love for me? It shall be very short.'

Aly.—'Speak on, my honoured friend.'

The Imam.—'My dearest Sheikh, I call now with delight to mind those precious days we used to spend together in mosque or college, dwelling on social matters and spiritual converse. Seven years have passed since then; and now thou art removed far from me in faith and worship. But friendship remaineth. The separation hath been grievous to me all these days; and now thou art about to depart to the world beyond. Call to mind, I pray you, the blessed Coran, and that which our Lord hath revealed therein; and from the ways of error into which you have wandered all these years return unto the faith of the Lord and his Prophet, and thou shalt obtain pardon through the intercession of the chiefest of the prophets, and entrance into the paradise of delight and peace. Receive the prayer of one who loves thee as his own soul, and thy example may bring back those others who have erred like thee. Thou shalt thus obtain a great reward, and turn my sorrow into joy and peace.'

During this address Sheikh Aly at times smiled, and at others looked grave and troubled. His friends about him were much distressed; and one thought to answer in his stead, but held back, as it seemed hardly what he would like. At last the aged Sheikh raised himself on his couch, and made answer:—

'Yes, my dear and honoured friend, I have come to the end of my journey here. And I thank my God,

who hath sent thee to me, that I might bid thee a last farewell, with words I have long wished to speak to thee ; and I pray thee to listen with patience, and with the partiality of so generous a friend ; for, be assured, my concern for your welfare does not yield in its solicitude to yours for me.'

He then went briefly over the manner in which he had been led by various passages in the Coran to study the Scriptures, in which he found peace ; and he urged his friend to read the same with a candid and impartial mind, when he, too, would find Jesus to be the Saviour—the WORD of the living God. He had himself been a strict adherent of Islam, and devoted, more if possible even than his friend, to its works of merit as a means of acceptance and salvation. Like his friend, he had been used to look on the Bible as tampered with ; but, in company with others of his friends, after careful sifting of the evidence, they had found it to be beyond doubt genuine, and been led thereby into the straight path—the path of everlasting life.

'And now,' he ended, 'my journey has come to a close. I do not fear death, for my Saviour hath stripped it of its horrors and its sting. He shall change this vile body into a glorious one at His coming in the clouds ; and with these very eyes I shall see His glorious face. Darkness will hardly have overshadowed the earth this night before I shall be in that blessed paradise where there is no night ; for the night of grief and weeping, of toil and warfare, will have given place to the morning of light and joy.'

But a few more minutes, and the sun of glory will have arisen upon me. I beseech of you, my friends, I beseech you, my dearest Sheikh, to take it as my last bequest, a sacred trust, in return for all your love and care, that you redeem the time by studying the Bible, which God hath sent to be the guide of faith and life; the book to which the Coran bears witness, and which will enrich its follower with divine grace and favour.'

His heart was moved with fervour as he spoke, and the tears rolled down his pallid cheeks upon his beard. All present were hushed as he ended the affectionate appeal, and taken captive by his noble attitude and heavenly presence, full of peace and joy. They sat silent around his couch, unable to leave it till the end was near; when, seeing numbers of his Christian friends and ministers arrive, they rose and silently slipped away.

We must here go back a little, to make mention of the sons of the martyr Omar. After their return from the Lebanon, the exiles did everything in their power to get charge of them, especially Aly and Mehmud, whom their father had constituted their guardians; but failed. The boys remained under charge of their uncles, who placed them in the Rashidy College. Now, on Aly falling sick, their mother visited him, and sat in much sorrow by his bedside. The aged man spake comfortably to her, and also reminded her of her husband's desire as to the guardianship of her boys. At this she wept.

'Blessing on his dear eyes!' she exclaimed, as she

wiped away her tears. 'I wish not that there should be anything not in accord with his bequest ; but thou knowest, my honoured sir, that it is not within my power to make complete fulfilment of its terms.'

'I know it well,' answered Aly ; 'but, please God, your sons will not be left or be forgotten by Him.'

Then he began to speak wisely and kindly to her about the Christian faith, and the hope of the life to come, which had led their little company to give up all worldly preferment, and her husband life itself for the same. She became much affected, for she was a wise and thoughtful woman ; nor had she forgotten what her husband had taught her, especially in his last days. She listened attentively to all, and asked the Sheikh many appropriate questions as to our Saviour's history and teaching, which he answered with much feeling and delight. Then she took hold of both his hands, and thanking him for his kind and loving words, kissed them, and said that, please God, she would embrace the Christian faith, follow in the path of her husband, and use all her endeavour to bring up her sons in the same. Then, as she rose to go, he slipped into her hand a little purse of golden dinars. At first she declined to take it, but he pressed her, saying, 'It is for your own dear boys ;' so she took it thankfully, and departed ; and the Sheikh had full confidence that she would fulfil what she had said.

Now, after her husband's death, many of the citizens had sought her hand, and though some of them were amongst the rich and noble, she refused.

She was young and fair to look upon, and one of the most discreet and attractive women in the city. So, after she had gone away, the Sheikh called his brother Hasan, who was unmarried, and left it as his last wish that he should try to engage her affections and take her as his wife, when she had embraced the Christian faith, and so bring up her sons as his own. This Hasan promised to do.

We now return to the death-bed of the Sheikh, after the departure of his Moslem friends. The interview and his earnest address to the Imam had left him very weak, and he lay quiet and restful after it for about an hour. The pulse and strength began gradually to sink, and he thought that he would pass away at sunset. After a little he revived, and called his sons and daughters to his bedside. As they stood around he said with a firm voice, 'My brother, and dear children, call to mind how, throughout my life, I have sought patiently and kindly to guide you, both in the things of this life and of that which is to come. When your mother died, I did not take another to wife, lest she might have been unkind to you, and perhaps to me also because of my love for you. Forget not your father's affection and labour for you. I bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath called me through the knowledge of His Son into His blessed kingdom, that He hath given me before my death the desire of my heart, to see my brother, my children, following of the Saviour. And now I die happy, in the hope of meeting you in the kingdom of rest and joy above. But there is one

thing above all others which I charge you with,' (pointing to the Bible that lay on his table),—'bring it to me,' and they brought it. 'This priceless treasure, wherein are the words of eternal life, I leave with you. It is the best inheritance. All else passeth away; but the word of the Lord abideth for ever. Amen.'

Then, after sundry injunctions and advice, he warned them lest they should be beguiled by the world and its temptations; and bade them live in peace and love amongst themselves, and also with those without, and ended thus:—

'Now the God of peace and love, who hath called me, and watched over me, and kept me from evil even unto this day, bless you and forward you in all godly and holy living, according to His good pleasure, and grant us to meet at last in the kingdom of His glory. Amen. Amen.'

They all wept, and fell upon him, and kissed his hands; and he, too, kissed them. And they promised that they would strive to live after the Gospel, and never forget his precious last words. And he rejoiced greatly thereat; and again pressed them to his bosom and kissed them.

Then he turned to the Christian friends and brethren who now crowded round him. 'My companions and comrades in the Christian warfare, with whom I have lived in all brotherly comfort and love! I rejoice exceedingly in calling to mind your constancy and the good fight ye have fought against the temptations of the world and the deceits of the flesh,

and all the enmity and opposition around us ; the help also you have been to many, to your own households, friends, and specially unto me. Thanks be unto God, who hath called us unto His eternal kingdom. And now, brethren, and beloved friends, the time of separation hath come : for I go to my Saviour, and shall behold with mine own eyes what I have heretofore known by faith alone ; and ye see me rejoicing in this hope through the merits of my Saviour. May you have a long and prosperous life, to the glory of God, and may we all meet hereafter in the everlasting kingdom of our Father ! And I have the hope that ye will look with an eye of affection on these your brother's children around my bed, with all needful advice and care for their godly up-bringing. Now, draw near unto me, brethren, that I may bid you farewell.' So they drew near and embraced and kissed him, and he kissed them, saying : ' May the Lord have you in His holy keeping, my beloved friends, and give you to finish your journey in peace and joy ! Then they departed, all in deep distress.'

When they had gone, Sheikh Mehmud said,—

' Dear friend, you must be weak and weary after so much speaking. We pray the Lord, if it be His will, to restore you to health, that you may yet live to His glory here ; but if it be not His will, and thou precede us to the heavenly rest, then God bless you ; and our hope is, by the merits of our Saviour, to meet you in that blessed land where there is no more parting, sorrow, or pain. Your brother and your children will be watched over by our Father. To

be praise that they are followers of the Saviour, in all virtue and godly endeavour. We hold them as our very own brother and children; and shall regard it as one of our sacred duties to attend to them in all that may require our care. Let your heart on that point be set at ease.'

Aly gave them his heartfelt thanks. 'The Lord calleth me, and I long to go and see Him. Pray not, therefore, for my recovery and return to this world's life; but praise the Lord, and bless His holy name.'

Then he drew up his feet into the bed; after that he could not speak for over an hour, and tossed about upon the bed-clothes as one that is tossed at sea. But this passed off, and then he lay still and quiet with the marks of peace and comfort on his aged face. At times he looked as if his lips were moving with a smile. At the last he opened his eyes, and said, 'Yes, Lord; here I am, ready;' and then for a time again he remained motionless and silent; and once again, after a little, in a low but clear and peaceful voice, these words: 'O Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And so, at last, he gave up the ghost, and his spirit returned unto God his Saviour.

Seeing that he was gone, they all came round his bed with loud lamentation; and when it was noised abroad, crowds of his friends, Moslems as well as Christians, surrounded his door, all equally mourning his decease; for, as will have been gathered, he was a man greatly beloved for his generous life, and his benevolent and noble bearing. Moreover, although his conversion had grievously pained the Moslem

community, the greater part, and not merely his intimate friends and companions, retained their regard and affection for him. When the news of his death reached the authorities, they resolved on sending a guard to accompany the funeral to the burial-ground, lest anything untoward should occur by the way. So an officer was deputed, with a company of fifty gendarmes to go in front of the bier.

Now his family and friends all assisted in preparing the body for the burial, and wept as they placed it in the winding-sheet, and so upon the bier. On the following day, about the sixth hour, the procession was formed. First went the military escort, next the clergy, ministers, and chief officials of the various Christian churches; then the bier, and behind it the family of the deceased, with the other friends and relatives following; then an immense crowd of all religions. The procession passed along to the Evangelical church, into which the bier was carried and reverently placed. Then one of the clergy ascended the pulpit, and after reading a passage from the Gospel, gave a touching address on the life of the deceased, and the victory he had won, from the text, 'I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them' (Rev. xiv. 13). A marvellous calm the while hushed into stillness that great assemblage of all races and religions. The address ended, there followed a hymn of praise to God, and then the bier was again

and carried to the Christian burying-ground, where, in presence of all, it was committed with honour and reverence to the dust.

The brothers and sons of Aly placed a beautiful monument over the grave, with the dates of birth and death, and that also of his embracing the Christian faith. Various verses were added from the gospel which he had been fond of repeating ; and in large letters of gold, these words, which he uttered with his expiring breath :—

‘O LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT.’

Most of Aly’s companions mentioned in this story lived long after his decease in perfect freedom and peace, drawing many by their life and example, of various faiths and races, to believe in the Gospel. And in the end they all fell asleep in the Lord, leaving behind them, as a precious legacy to their family and friends, the memory of a Christian life and conversation.

And lastly, we should not omit to mention that the behest of Sheikh Aly, to seek in marriage the hand of Maryam, widow of the martyr Omar, was fulfilled. With their mother he took also her two sons to his house ; and they all lived in peace and happiness many years, advancing in knowledge, virtue, and piety all the days of their life.

THE END.

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